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THE
LIFE AND SPEECHES
OF
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
JOHN BRIGHT, M.P.

BY
GEORGE BARNETT SMITH,
AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF THE RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P."

*WITH GALLERY OF PORTRAITS OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES
ETCHED BY CHARLES LAURIE.*

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CHAPTER XXI.

MR. BRIGHT ON CANADA.—GOVERNOR EYRE.—THE DEATH OF COBDEN.

Relations between England and the United States in 1865.—Excitement in England.—The Defences of Canada.—Debates in the House of Commons—Speech of Mr. Bright.—Causes of the Panic.—Mr. Laird and the *Alabama*.—Our attitude towards the American Republic.—Mr. Bright on the Defence of the Canadian Frontier.—The Storm blows over.—Canadian Affairs in 1867.—Nova Scotia and the Confederation Scheme.—The Jamaica Massacre.—Governor Eyre condemned.—Mr. Bright on the Murder of Mr. Gordon.—Report of the Commission on the Massacre.—Prosecution of Governor Eyre.—Charge of the Lord Chief Justice.—Mr. Carlyle's Vindication of Mr. Eyre.—Death of Mr. Cobden.—Sketch of his Career.—His Character.—Tributes to the Deceased in the House of Commons.—Mr. Bright's Speech on unveiling the Statue at Bradford.—Funeral of Mr. Cobden at West Lavington.—Scene at the Grave.

THE relations between England and the United States were somewhat strained at the opening of the year 1865. There was a suspicion in this country that our hostility during the war might cause retaliation on the part of the States, and the attention of English statesmen was directed to our Canadian possessions. A portion of the American press, moreover, was very active in endeavouring to foment discord. Previous to the meeting of Parliament, the American Government gave formal notice of their intention to terminate the Convention under which England and the United States had mutually agreed not to fit out naval armaments upon the Canadian lakes. There were also some indications that America desired to terminate the Treaty of Commerce between the States and the provinces of British North America. The Fenian rising at

this time added another disquieting element in the situation, and one which it was believed would result in great embarrassment in case of a rupture between England and the United States. Something of a panic ensued in the public mind in England, and the defences of Canada became one of the leading topics of the session. Mr. Bright endeavoured to calm the feelings of the people on this question, and when the danger blew over it was seen that his advice from the first had been right and wise.

The English Government, while themselves deprecating alarm, nevertheless directed a report to be prepared by an engineer officer, Colonel Jervois, upon the existing state of the province as to the means of defence against invasion, and as to the measures and expenditure required to place the frontier in a complete state of security. On the assembling of Parliament, attention was called to the matter; but Lord Palmerston entreated the House of Commons to abstain from discussion of these topics at the present moment, and not gratuitously to assume that the people of the United States were hostilely disposed towards this country.

Further debates, however, took place in both Houses; and on the 13th of March Mr. Seymour Fitzgerald formally introduced the whole subject in the Commons. In the course of the debate Mr. Cardwell said our relations with the United States were perfectly friendly; but if the time ever came that Canada was at war, war with Canada would be war with England. Mr. Disraeli did not see that there was any immediate danger of our being placed in collision with the Americans owing to our connexion with Canada. Lord Palmerston said he trusted that the two countries and Governments would both feel it to be their interest by every honourable means to preserve peace, and that the subjects indicated were not such as to be incapable of amicable adjustment.

Mr. Bright, in a very elaborate speech, unfolded his views generally upon our relations with Canada. The question was one of delicacy, he said, for it referred to the possibility of war between this country and the United States. The difficulty was that if there were a war party in the United States, it had a strong temptation to enter without hesitation on a war with England, because it might

feel that through Canada it could inflict a great humiliation upon this country. It was perfectly well known, moreover, that there was no power whatever in this United Kingdom to defend successfully the territory of Canada against the power of the United States. Now, would Canada attack the States? Clearly not. Would the States attack Canada? Clearly not. There was not a man of any influence in the United States in favour of this, with a view to the forcible annexation of Canada to the Union. The ruffians from the South, who had made a raid in Northern territory, had been far too leniently treated. There had been nothing done previous to this raid, but the moment these troubles arose, then there was a call for further defence, and everything was done.

‘What is the state of things now?’ asked Mr. Bright. ‘There is the greatest possible calm on the frontier. The United States have not a word to say against Canada. The Canadian people have found that they were in the wrong, and have now returned to their right mind. There is not a man in Canada at this moment, I believe, who has any idea that the United States Government has the smallest notion of attacking them, now or at any future time, on account of anything that has transpired between the United States and Canada during these trials. But if there comes a war in which Canada shall suffer and be made a victim, it will be a war between the Government of Washington and the Government of London.’ This he considered was a most improbable event. Our history for two hundred years back had been a record of calamitous wars, but England had now become wiser. She was not at this moment in favour of war, and if war arose out of which Canada should suffer, he believed honestly that it would not come from this country. But was the United States for war? On the contrary, no Government that had ever existed in America had been so favourable to peace with all foreign countries, and especially England, as the Government of which Mr. Lincoln was the head. Whence, then, came the anxiety which undoubtedly to some extent prevailed?

‘It may be assumed even that the Government is not wholly free from it, for they have shown it in an almost ludicrous manner by proposing a vote of £50,000. It is said the newspapers have got into a sort of panic. They can do that any night

between the hours of six and twelve o'clock, when they write their articles. They are either very courageous or very panic-stricken.

'It is said that "the City" joins in this feeling. We know what "the City" means—the right hon. gentleman alluded to it to-night. It means that the people who deal in shares—though that does not describe the whole of them—"the moneyed interest" of the City, are alarmed. Well, I never knew the City to be right. Men who are deep in great monetary transactions, and who are steeped to the lips sometimes in perilous speculations, are not able to take broad and dispassionate views of political questions of this nature.

'As to the newspapers, I agree with my hon. friend the member for Bradford (Mr. W. E. Forster) when, referring to one of them in particular, he intimated that he thought its course was indicated by a wish to cover its own confusion. Surely, after four years' uninterrupted publication of lies with regard to America, I should think it has done pretty much to destroy its influence on foreign questions for ever.'

As to the meddlesomeness of the House of Lords on foreign questions, and their general neglect of legislation, Mr. Bright went on to say: The Commons did little in the way of work, and the Lords absolutely nothing. Members would remember a couplet, taught them in their younger days, and intended to inculcate the virtue of industry:

'Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do;'

and he did not believe that men, however high in station, were exempt from that unfortunate effect which arose to every one from a course of continued idleness. With regard to the origin of the public anxiety on this question, was there not a consciousness in our heart of hearts that we had not behaved generously to our neighbour—a pricking of conscience that tended to make us cowards at this particular juncture? Mr. Bright then reviewed the course of events of the past four years, observing that the Government had accorded belligerent rights to the Southern Confederacy with unfriendly haste; they had acted in the case of the *Trent* in a manner that was not likely to remove difficulties and improve the feeling between the two nations; and had permitted the *Alabama* to be built, supplied with munitions of war, and manned in this country.

In connection with the affair of the *Alabama* came this spirited attack on Mr. Laird:—

‘I do not complain that the member for Birkenhead has struck up a friendship with Captain Semmes, who may probably be described, as another sailor once was of similar pursuits, as being “the mildest mannered man that ever scuttled ship.” (Laughter.) Therefore I do not complain of a man who has an acquaintance with that notorious person; and I do not complain, and did not then, that the member for Birkenhead looks admiringly upon the greatest example which men have ever seen of the greatest crime which men have ever committed. I do not complain even that he should applaud that which is founded upon a gigantic traffic in living flesh and blood—a traffic into which no subject of this realm can enter without being deemed a felon in the eyes of our law, and punished as such. But what I do complain of is this, that the hon. gentleman the member for Birkenhead, a magistrate of a county, a deputy-lieutenant—whatever that may be,—a representative of a constituency, and having a seat in this ancient and honourable assembly,—that he should, as I believe he did, if concerned in the building of this ship, break the law of his country, by driving us into an infraction of international law, and treating with undeserved disrespect the proclamation of neutrality by the Queen. (Hear, hear.)

‘I have another complaint to make, and in allusion to that hon. member. It is within your recollection that when on a former occasion he made that speech and defended his course, he declared that he would rather be the builder of a dozen *Alabamas* than do something which nobody has done. That language was received with repeated cheering from the Opposition side of the House. Well, Sir, I undertake to say that that was at least a most unfortunate circumstance, and I beg to tell the hon. gentleman that at the end of last session, when the great debate took place on the question of Denmark, there were many men on this side of the House who had no objection whatever to see the present Government turned out of office, for they had many grounds of complaint against them; but they felt it impossible that they should take the responsibility of bringing into office the right hon. member for Buckinghamshire or the party who could utter such cheers on such a subject as that.’ (Cheers.)

Mr. Bright next showed that there had been a gradual change of feeling amongst Ministers and in the House on the American question since the time of Mr. Gladstone’s declaration at Newcastle, to the effect that the South had established itself as a nation. He also referred to the indiscriminating abuse heaped upon the United States by Mr. Roebuck, and the unsleeping ill-will of Lord Cranborne (the Marquis of Salisbury). Being interrupted by Mr. Roebuck with an expression that he adhered to his old sentiments, Mr. Bright said he was sorry to hear it. He had hoped that these things would be regretted and repented of, and trusted that if any in this country who had been thus ungenerous should fall into trouble, they would find friends more kind and more just across the Atlantic. The millions of Lancashire and Yorkshire—whose industry had not

only created but sustained the fabric of the national power—had no kind of sympathy with the views which he had been condemning. ‘They have been more generous and more wise; they have shown that magnanimity and love of freedom are not extinct. And, speaking of the county from which I come—the county of many sorrows, whose griefs have hung like a dark cloud over almost every heart during the last three years—all the attempts which the agents of the Confederacy have made there by money, by printing, by platform speeches, by agitation, have utterly failed to get from that population one expression of sympathy with the American insurrection.’ If the bond of union and friendship between England and America should remain unbroken, they would not have to thank the wealthy and the cultivated, but those laborious millions whom statesmen and histories too frequently took little account of.

There was, no doubt, said Mr. Bright, a war party in the United States, and that was the Irish party; but it was merely a small percentage, which had no sensible effect upon the constitution of Congress, or upon legislation or government. With regard to the claims made by the respective countries, it was quite absurd to suppose that the English Government and the Government at Washington could have a question about half a million of money which they could not amicably settle. When the passions had cooled down, he was quite sure that Mr. Seward, Earl Russell, Mr. Adams, and Sir Frederick Bruce would be able without much difficulty to settle this matter. Having observed that a great many bubbles would burst before that which had been described as the ‘bubble republic of America,’ the speaker went on to say: ‘Some people fear that, should America become a great nation, she will be arrogant and aggressive. It does not follow that it should be so. The character of a nation does not depend altogether upon its size, but upon the instruction, the civilisation, and the morals of its people. You fancy the supremacy of the sea will pass away from you; and the noble lord, who has had much experience, and is supposed to be wiser on the subject than any other man in the House, will say that “Rule Britannia” may become obsolete. Well, inasmuch as the supremacy of the seas means arrogance and the

assumption of a dictatorial power on the part of this country, the sooner that becomes obsolete the better.' Nature would not be baffled because we were jealous of the United States. The States were rapidly growing in population; and would constant snarling at a great republic alter this state of things, or swell us up in these islands to 40,000,000 or 50,000,000, or bring them down to our 30,000,000? Finally, Mr. Bright observed—

'It is on record that when the author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was about to begin his great work, David Hume wrote a letter to him urging him not to employ the French but the English tongue; "because," he said, "our establishments in America promise superior stability and duration to the English language." How far that promise has been in part fulfilled, we who are living now can see; but how far it will be more largely and more completely fulfilled in after-times we must leave after-times to tell. I believe that in the centuries which are to come it will be the greatest pride and the highest renown of England, that from her loins have sprung a hundred millions—it may be two hundred millions—of men who dwell and prosper on that continent which the grand old Genoese gave to Europe. Sir, if the sentiments which I have uttered shall become the sentiments of the Parliament and people of the United Kingdom—if the moderation which I have described shall mark the course of the Government and of the people of the United States—then, notwithstanding some present irritation and some present distrust—and I have faith both in us and in them—I believe that these two great commonwealths will march abreast, the parents and the guardians of freedom and justice, wheresoever their language shall be spoken and their power shall extend.' (Loud cheers.)

Some days after this discussion, Lord Hartington proposed a vote of £50,000 for the fortification of Quebec, being part of a sum of £200,000 which would be asked for the defences of Canada. A lengthy debate ensued upon the policy of defending Canada by fortifications, and also upon the best mode of resistance in the event of invasion from the United States. In the end the sum was voted by a large majority.

Mr. Bright opposed the vote, reiterating his conviction that no one believed this country could attempt a successful defence of the frontier of Canada against the whole power of the United States. He objected to the vote, not on the ground that he did not believe in the probability of war, or that the amount was too large, but that its expenditure would be taken as a menace; the most that it could do was to show that some people here, and the Government itself,

had some little distrust of the United States. So far, it might be productive of injury. He maintained that the vote was the commencement of a policy which we should have to abandon, because it would entail on the Canadians a burden in respect to fortifications that would make them dissatisfied with this country, and ultimately lead to their separation from us. To that separation he did not object. It would be better for both. But of all the misfortunes that could happen to Canada, this would be the greatest, that their separation should take place after a period of irritation and estrangement; and that we should have on the American continent another element hostile to England. He regretted the proposition, but after all it was like everything else that was done by the Government, who appeared to be divided into two parties, one pulling one way and one the other. The result was that they pleased nobody, and failed to produce a good effect in any direction. He did not place much reliance on the speech of Mr. Disraeli, because on matters of this kind, whatever might be their animosities in other directions, the Opposition and the Ministerialists always shook hands. No doubt if Mr. Disraeli were on the Treasury Bench, and Lord Palmerston were sitting opposite to him, the latter would extend to Mr. Disraeli the very same support that he now received from him. 'This question seems to me so plain,' urged Mr. Bright, 'so much on the surface, appealing so much to our common sense, having in it such great issues for the future, that I am persuaded it is the duty of the House of Commons on this occasion to take the matter out of the hands of the Executive Government, and to determine that, with regard to the future policy of Canada, we will not ourselves expend the money of the English tax-payers, and not force upon the tax-payers of Canada a burden which, I am satisfied, they will not long continue to bear.'

As Mr. Bright predicted, the storm blew over, and early in April the Government received an intimation from Mr. Seward that the Government of the United States intended to withdraw its notice for the abrogation of the treaty of 1817, and that the passport system would cease immediately.

Two years later, nevertheless, the affairs of Canada again

occupied the attention of the British Legislature. In February, 1867, the Conservative Government introduced the North American Provinces Confederation Bill, which provided for the union of Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, under the name of the Dominion of Canada, with a Parliament, to consist of the Queen, a Senate of 72 members, and a House of Commons of 181 members.

When the second reading was moved in the Lower House, Mr. Bright, amongst others, complained of the manner in which the bill had been hurried on. There was a petition signed by 31,000 adult males of Nova Scotia—more than half the adult population—against Nova Scotia being included. Whether the scheme were a good one or a bad one, scarcely anything could be more foolish than that any of the provinces should be dragged into it. He could not discover any urgency in the matter at all. Mr. Gladstone had referred to the desire of the Canadians to copy as closely as possible the institutions of the mother-country; but he (Mr. Bright) ventured to say that the clause enabling the Governor-General and his Cabinet to put seventy men in the council for life, inserted into the whole scheme the germ of a malady which would spread, and which before very long would require an alteration of this Act and of the constitution of this new Confederation. There were some other points he desired to mention—one of great importance. What was to be done with the question of defence? Was this country to continue to maintain 12,000 or 14,000 men to garrison the fortresses of Canada, which, after all, would be of no service if the country were invaded by the Americans? But there was no desire on the part of America to annex Canada forcibly. There were persons who ill-naturedly said the loyalty of the Canadians had its price; but certainly if they applied to us for railway grants, works of defence, &c., it would be better for us, and less demoralising to them, that they should become an independent State. The time had come when it should be clearly understood that the taxes of this country were no longer to go across the Atlantic to pay the expenses of the government of the colonies. Canada ran no risk of aggression whatever, and every farthing spent with the idea of shutting out American aggression was money squandered through a hallucination

which we ought to get rid of. 'For my share,' added the speaker, 'I want the population of these provinces to do that which they believe best for their own interests—to remain with this country if they like it, in the most friendly manner, or to become independent States if they wish it. If they should prefer to unite themselves with the United States, I should not complain even of that. But whatever be their course, there is no man in this House or in those provinces who has a more sincere wish for their greatness and their welfare than I have who have taken the liberty thus to criticise this bill.'

The bill passed through both Houses, and became law on the 29th of March. In the following year there was a Fenian raid into Canada, which was vigorously repelled by the militia; but we need not go through the subsequent history of Canada. Suffice it to state, that whatever differences afterwards arose were amicably settled, and that she now presents to the world an enterprising and intelligent population of four million persons, enjoying the fullest measure of civil and religious liberty, and using their best efforts for the colonisation of British North America.

In the year 1865 occurred the Jamaica massacre, an event which greatly excited the people of this country, and divided the most eminent of our literary men and statesmen into hostile camps. A negro insurrection having begun at Morant Bay, by resistance offered to the capture of a negro criminal, on the 9th of October, Governor Eyre suppressed the rebellion by a high-handed exercise of his powers. Martial law was proclaimed in the island. Not content, however, with suppressing the insurrection, Governor Eyre continued the executions, and amongst those condemned to death, even on ludicrously insufficient *prima facie* evidence, was George William Gordon, a coloured member of the Legislature, and also a member of one of the Christian churches in Jamaica. Gordon, indeed, was seized in a part of the island which was not under martial law, and yet he was tried by martial law, and murdered. When the report of Governor Eyre's unwarrantable and sanguinary proceedings reached this country, together with his own despatches, a feeling of indignation was aroused amongst a great body of the

people. Others, again, acting under the impression that the Governor had saved the colony, defended deeds which history must mark with the stamp of infamy.

Meetings condemnatory of Governor Eyre took place in various parts of the country. At one held in Manchester, his antecedents were fully laid before the audience, and every credit given him for his conduct while in Australia. All that the meeting demanded was an investigation, and a deputation was appointed to wait on Earl Russell to prefer that request. As Mr. T. B. Potter observed, the meeting wished to do nothing unjust towards him; they merely wished that the name of England might be vindicated from what they considered a blot on the national escutcheon. Mr. Bright, speaking at Rochdale on the trial and execution of Mr. Gordon, said that from beginning to end it was a mass of illegality, and he believed there was not a judge sitting upon the bench in the United Kingdom who, speaking in his private capacity, would doubt for one single moment that Mr. Gordon was murdered. At a meeting held at Bradford he said: 'I take my opinion only from documents furnished here, by those whose interest it is to put the most favourable interpretation on their conduct, and I say that murder is foul, and that there is no murder more foul than that done by men in authority under the pretence of law; I say if murder has not yet changed its name, and be yet a crime visited with punishment in this country, then I hope that the Governor of Jamaica and his accomplices will have to stand at the bar of justice for the murder of Mr. Gordon.'

For these utterances the member for Birmingham fell under the ban of the not very withering eloquence of Sir John Pakington, in the House of Commons. The question arose on the Report of the Address being brought up on the 9th of February 1866. Mr. Bright replied very forcibly to his critic, and having dismissed all idea of party feeling, said he had not prejudged Governor Eyre. He reiterated his belief that Mr. Gordon had been cruelly murdered. In condemning the Governor he had taken the latter's own statement. He grieved to say that there were many persons in this country who did not feel the same sense of wrong and injustice when anything like this happened, if it were inflicted only upon those unfortunate

‘niggers,’ as they would if white men had suffered in a similar manner. He regarded every life among those men—before the law and before the sovereign authority of the Queen—as important as any life in this country or in the House, and it was idle to tell him that when he stood on a platform before thousands of his countrymen, he was to consider, because they were black, the lives of 2000 subjects of the Queen as nothing in comparison with the feelings of Governor Eyre and his accomplices. But the Government had appointed a Commission, and he would leave the matter to the thorough investigation of such Commission. ‘I say, Sir,’ Mr. Bright continued, ‘that the right hon. gentleman has allowed, it may be, an official sympathy for Governor Eyre to weigh with him in this matter, and he has thought it necessary to give me notice that he would come down to the House and pronounce a solemn censure upon my conduct. I tell him that in all the public speeches I have ever made—and they are not a few, as the House knows—there are no passages in those speeches to which I will to my last hour more firmly adhere than to those which the right hon. gentleman has commented upon. There is nothing in them that I have to condemn myself for—there is nothing in them that I retract; and if the same circumstances happened again, I would repeat those passages, and, if it were possible, with a more burning indignation would I condemn atrocities which have cast a foul blot upon the character of English governors.’

When the Report of the Commissioners was published, it was found that the view taken by the opponents of Governor Eyre had been perfectly substantiated and justified. The Commissioners reported that 439 persons had suffered by martial law; that about 1000 dwellings had been burnt; that about 600 persons (including aged matrons, young boys, and women in expectation of confinement) had been flogged, in many cases with a new instrument of torture made of piano-wire; that the punishments inflicted were excessive, the executions unnecessarily frequent, the burning of houses wanton; and that they saw no proof of Gordon's complicity in the outbreak, or in an organised conspiracy against Government.

The home Government having declined to prosecute Governor Eyre, the 'Jamaica Committee' was formed for this purpose, with Mr. John Stuart Mill for chairman. This was followed by the formation of the 'Eyre Defence and Aid Fund,' which had for its president the Earl of Shrewsbury, and for its vice-presidents Thomas Carlyle and Sir Roderick Murchison. Amongst other defenders of Mr. Eyre, either actively or by subscription, were Mr. Ruskin, Mr. Tennyson, Prof. Tyndall, the Rev. Charles Kingsley, and Sir Thomas Gladstone, besides several noblemen whose names were not of much weight or moment. But against these, and for the vindication of law and justice, are to be set the names of Mr. J. Stuart Mill, Mr. Bright, Prof. Fawcett, Mr. Joseph Cowen, M.P., Mr. Herbert Spencer, Professors Thorold Rogers, Cairnes, F. W. Newman, Beesly, and Goldwin Smith, and many members of Parliament and others. The proceedings against Governor Eyre and his associates proved abortive, the bills against them being thrown out; but there fortunately remains in the annals of our jurisprudence the irrefragable charge of Lord Chief Justice Cockburn—one of the finest charges ever delivered by an English judge, and one which at the same time leaves not a shadow of a doubt as to the substantial guilt of Governor Eyre. Efforts were subsequently made to restore the discredited Governor to the public service, but, naturally and justly, these were unsuccessful.

On a dispassionate view of the case, few will be prepared to deny now that Mr. Bright was on the side of truth and humanity in regard to this important question. It is monstrous to suppose that Governor Eyre will be acquitted at the bar of history for deeds which were only worthy of the Dark Ages. We may, in fact, be doing the Dark Ages an injustice in this matter. Mr. Carlyle, carrying out the doctrines of his 'Discourse on the Nigger Question,' defended Mr. Eyre, but the language in which he did so caused the great bulk of his warmest admirers keen regret. Despotism and strength were his maxims of government, and the 'strong' man—even were he entirely destitute of the divine sentiments of justice and humanity—won his admiration. With such principles, it is not surprising that Mr. Carlyle became the vindi-

cator of Governor Eyre. Posterity will turn over, with averted eyes, this page in the history of the philosopher of Chelsea.

The closest and most intimate of Mr. Bright's personal and political friendships was severed by death on the 2nd of April 1865. On that day, Richard Cobden, one of the finest and best of Englishmen, passed away. Not a month before, Mr. Bright had visited his friend at Midhurst; and as they strolled through the lovely Sussex scenery together, Mr. Cobden, pointing to a little church in the distance, said, 'My poor boy lies there, and I shall soon be with him.' Mr. Bright says he little thought how soon, when a few days afterwards he went up to London. Mr. Cobden was anxious to take part in the discussion on the Canadian fortifications, and the proposed heavy expenditure of public money, which he severely condemned. The March of 1865 was a bitter month, and he was stricken by the cold, and fatally stricken. Ten days later his complaint became greatly aggravated, and on the 2nd of April he died. Mr. Bright observed many years afterwards, 'It was a circumstance somewhat singular, and very affecting to my mind, that on the very day when President Lincoln and the Northern forces entered the city of Richmond, and when, in point of fact, the slave confederacy was vanquished and at an end,—on that very day, on that very Sunday, that 2nd of April in the year 1865, the spirit of my friend left its earthly tenement, and took its way to another, and to him, doubtless, a brighter world.'

Richard Cobden—whose death was deeply mourned both in this country and in France—came of an old family of Sussex yeomen, and was born at the farm-house of Dunford, near Midhurst, June 3, 1804. Educated at the grammar school of Midhurst, on the death of his father he was sent to London, where he served an apprenticeship in a Manchester warehouse, afterwards becoming a traveller for the firm. In 1830 he entered into partnership with a firm of Lancashire calico printers, and his successful management of the concern brought large profits. He visited the Continent in 1834, and the United States in the following year. On his return he contributed, as remarked in a previous chapter, letters on political and economical topics to the *Manchester Times*, and also published

a pamphlet entitled, 'England, Ireland, and America, by a Manchester Manufacturer.' He wrote on behalf of peace, retrenchment, non-intervention, and free trade, and followed up his earlier efforts by another pamphlet on 'Russia,' in which he forcibly stated his views on the Eastern Question. Shortly afterwards began the Anti-Corn-Law campaign, which we have already described at length. Mr. Cobden first sat for Stockport in 1841, and afterwards for the West Riding of Yorkshire, and at a later period for Rochdale. When Lord Palmerston came into office, he offered Mr. Cobden the Presidency of the Board of Trade, with a seat in the Cabinet, but the offer was declined. In 1859, however, he accepted the important mission to Paris, where he had the chief direction of the Commercial Treaty with France. With rare disinterestedness, he declined all public reward for his services, an act of abnegation the more honourable to him, seeing that all this time his pecuniary affairs were in a somewhat embarrassed condition, owing to the depressed state of his American investments. It was proposed to raise a public subscription for him, but this he declined, and happily it became unnecessary in consequence of an improvement in the Share Market. As Sir Robert Peel did with regard to the Corn Laws, so Mr. Gladstone unstintedly gave the credit of the Commercial Treaty of 1860 to Mr. Cobden.

The character of Mr. Cobden was simple and most exemplary. The Bishop of Oxford, writing upon his death, said: 'I feel his loss deeply. I think it is a great national loss. His gentleness of nature, the tenderness and frankness of his affections, his exceeding modesty, his love of truth, and his ready and kindly sympathy—these invested him with an unusual charm for me.' As a public speaker, Mr. Cobden had not the fire, the energy, and the eloquence of Mr. Bright; but he had remarkably persuasive powers of his own. His delivery was earnest and impressive, his language unusually clear and well-chosen, his appeals to the reason of his listeners weighty and well-directed, and his power of argument singularly sustained and elastic. He had the power, as one critic has said, of winning converts, while overwhelming adversaries.

On the day following his death, the great loss which the

country had sustained was made known to the House of Commons by Lord Palmerston. Mr. Cobden's name, said his lordship, would be for ever engraved on the most interesting pages of the history of the country; and he was sure there was not one in the House who did not feel the deepest regret that they had lost one of its brightest ornaments, and that the country had been deprived of one of her most useful servants. Mr. Disraeli followed with an equally generous but more striking tribute to the deceased, whose closing words we must quote: 'There are some members of Parliament,' he said, 'who, though not present in the body, are still members of this House: independent of dissolutions, of the caprice of constituencies, even of the course of time. I think, Sir, Mr. Cobden was one of these men. I believe that when the verdict of posterity shall be recorded on his life and conduct, it will be said of him that he was, without doubt, the greatest political character the pure middle class of this country has yet produced—an ornament to the House of Commons, and an honour to England.'

Mr. Bright then rose, and, speaking under the influence of profound emotion, said: 'Sir, I feel that I cannot address the House on this occasion; but every expression of sympathy which I have heard has been most grateful to my heart. But the time which has elapsed since, in my presence, the manliest and gentlest spirit that ever tenanted or quitted a human form took its flight, is so short, that I dare not even attempt to give utterance to the feelings by which I am oppressed. I shall leave to some calmer moment, when I may have an opportunity of speaking before some portion of my countrymen, the lesson which I think may be learned from the life and character of my friend. I have only to say that after twenty years of most intimate and almost brotherly friendship with him, I little knew how much I loved him until I found that I had lost him.'

These few sentences were spoken with great difficulty, and at their close Mr. Bright sunk down into his seat, overwhelmed with grief.

That calmer moment, when the speaker hoped to have an

opportunity of enforcing the great lesson of Mr. Cobden's career, did not come until twelve years later, when Mr. Bright unveiled the statue raised to the memory of his friend at Bradford. This was on the 25th of July, 1877. On that occasion he briefly sketched Mr. Cobden's life, and described him as one of the best and noblest Englishmen of our time. The grand result which has followed the repeal of the Corn Laws, Mr. Bright thus eloquently touched upon: 'Now, if you cast your eyes over the globe, what is it you see? Look at Canada, look at the United States, whether on the Atlantic seaboard or on the Pacific slope; look at Chili; look at the Australian colonies; look at the great and rich province of Bengal; look on the shores of the Black Sea and the Baltic: wherever the rain falls, wherever the sun shines, wherever there are markets and granaries and harvest-fields, there are men and women everywhere gathering that which comes to this country for the sustenance of our people; and our fleets traverse every sea, and visit every port, and bring us the food which only about thirty years ago the laws of this civilised and Christian country denied to its people. You find it in Holy Writ, that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." We have put Holy Writ into an Act of Parliament, and since then of that fulness every man and woman and little child in this country may freely and abundantly partake.'

Mr. Bright then referred to the profound grief with which Mr. Cobden viewed the policy of England in the Crimean war; to the great work he did in connection with the French Treaty; and to the great sorrow which the American civil war occasioned him—though he always believed that the result of the war would be slavery abolished, and the consolidation of the Republic—still one and indivisible—as the advocate of peace and the promoter of civilisation. Then came the lesson of the great reformer's whole career:—

'I have lately been reading a new poem which has interested me very much—a poem called *The Epic of Hades*. Many of you may never have heard of it; most of you may not have seen it. It is, as I view it, another gem added to the wealth of the poetry of our language. In that poem the author says—

"For knowledge is a steep which few may climb,
While duty is a path which all may tread."

I think it will be admitted by those who know anything of the life of Mr. Cobden, that he trod what he believed to be the path of duty, and trod it with a firm and unfaltering footstep; and when I look upon this statue which is now before us, so like him, and so spotless, as was his name and character, I will say that I trust his following of the path of duty will have many imitators in this district; and that from this stainless marble, and from those voiceless lips, there may be taught a perpetual lesson to many generations of the intelligent and industrious men of this district of our country.

‘But let me add, that this which you have erected to-day, or which is erected in your midst, is by no means the greatest monument that has been built up to him. There is one far grander, and of wider significance. There is not a homestead in the country in which there is not added comfort from his labours,—not a cottage the dwellers in which have not steadier employment, higher wages, and a more solid independence. This is his enduring monument. He worked for these ends, and for these great purposes, and he worked even almost to the very day when the lamp of life went out. He is gone; but his character, his deeds, his life, his example, remain a possession to us his countrymen. And let this be said of him for generations to come, as long as the great men of England are spoken of in the English language; let it be said of him that Richard Cobden gave the labours of a life that he might confer upon his countrymen perfect freedom of industry, and with it, not that blessing only, but its attendant blessings of plenty and of peace.’

There were those who wished Mr. Cobden to be interred with public honours in Westminster Abbey; but, in accordance with his own request, he was laid to rest in the churchyard of West Lavington, near his own residence, and beside the remains of his only son, whose premature death had greatly and seriously affected him. Such a funeral was quite in accord with the utterly unostentatious character of the man. The melancholy ceremony took place on the 7th of April, 1865. Deputations attended from many of the large towns; and in addition to the many private mourners present, the House of Commons and the Crown were alike represented. Before the family and the intimate friends left the house, a touching incident, which Mr. Bright himself has preserved, occurred. ‘Standing by me,’ he said, in the address from which we have already quoted, ‘and leaning on the coffin, was his sorrowing daughter, one whose attachment to her father seems to have been a passion scarcely equalled amongst daughters. She said, “My father used to like me very much to read to him the Sermon on the Mount.” His own life was to a large extent—I speak it with reverence and with hesitation—a sermon based

upon that best, that greatest of all sermons. His was a life of perpetual self-sacrifice.'

The funeral was conducted with a total absence of parade and pomp. A plain hearse, followed by four plain mourning coaches, constituted the whole *cortège*, the remaining carriages being those which had brought the London visitors from the station, or those of friends and neighbours. At the entrance to the churchyard the coffin was taken from the hearse, the pall was thrown over it, and the mourners ranged themselves on each side. The pall was borne by twelve of the deceased's political and personal friends—viz., Mr. Bright, Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Villiers, Mr. George Wilson, Mr. Milner Gibson, Mr. Moffatt, Mr. T. B. Potter, Mr. A. W. Paulton, Mr. H. Ashworth, Mr. Bazley, Mr. W. Evans, and Mr. T. Thomasson. Besides the members of Mr. Cobden's family, and private mourners, there were also present Lords Alfred and Clarence Paget, Lord Kinnaird, Sir C. Wentworth Dilke, Mr. Gilpin, Mr. Ewart, Mr. Stansfeld, Sir J. Shelley, Mr. W. E. Forster, Sir F. Crossley, Sir Colman O'Loughlen, Mr. E. Baines, Sir S. M. Peto, Sir P. O'Brien, Sir Robert Clifton, Mr. Shaw Lefevre, Mr. P. A. Taylor, Mr. E. Miall, Prof. Fawcett, the Rev. Newman Hall, Mr. Samuel Morley, Mr. Robertson Gladstone, Dr. Hook (Dean of Chichester), Mr. Elihu Burritt, and Mr. Adams, the American Minister.

After the service in the church, the coffin was borne to the grave, the scene here being most impressive. The concluding portion of the burial service was now read by the Rev. Mr. Currie, with an emotion which was evidently felt by the whole of the mourners and distinguished circle that stood around. Mr. Bright was overcome with grief, and wept almost aloud; other friends standing by his side were also deeply moved; and Mr. Gladstone's pale face wore an expression of sad and deepened gravity as with much earnestness he followed the clergyman from his prayer-book. As the solemn words 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust' were pronounced, and the handful of earth was heard to rattle on the coffin-lid, there was a rush of friends to the opening of the vault, and a struggle to catch a farewell look at what was about to be shut in from them

for ever. The mourners then turned from the scene, and the funeral of one of the world's benefactors was over.

But, save for the members of Cobden's own family, he who felt the keenest anguish that day was the statesman who had been the close companion of the dead in his great and arduous labours. Not always, in the presence of the dead—though they may have been good, wise, and illustrious—can men rise to that calm height wherein they perceive the blessedness of death, and can say, 'They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.' Mr. Bright must have felt this on the death of Richard Cobden. A strong tie had been broken, a strong bond of affection and sympathy been snapped asunder. Where two had journeyed together, and taken counsel together, one was henceforth to travel alone.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE REFORM CAMPAIGN OF 1866.

Lord Russell and the Reform Question in 1865.—Mr. Bright at Birmingham.—Examination of Ministerial Policy.—Position of Reform.—Representation abroad and at home.—Rights of the English people.—Election at Rochdale.—Dissolution of Parliament.—Mr. Bright's Address to his Constituents.—Return of Messrs. Scholfield and Bright.—Vigorous Speech by Mr. Bright.—Smart Attack on Mr. Disraeli.—A fine Peroration.—Death of Lord Palmerston.—Speeches of Mr. Bright at Birmingham and Rochdale.—The Session of 1866.—Meeting of Parliament.—Discussion on the Cattle Plague.—Mr. Gladstone introduces the Reform Bill.—Mr. Bright supports it.—His reply to the Opponents of Reform.—Humorous Description of Mr. Horsman and Mr. Lowe.—The 'Adullamites.'—Effect of the Speech.—Reform Meetings in the Country.—Debate on the Second Reading of the Bill.—Elaborate Speech by Mr. Bright.—The Division.—Exciting Scene.—Defeat of the Government on Lord Dunkellin's Motion.—Resignation of the Ministry.—Lord Derby accedes to Office.—Reform Agitation in London and the Provinces.—Great Demonstrations at Birmingham.—Mr. Bright on the Derby Ministry.—Meeting at Manchester.—Enthusiastic Reception of Mr. Bright.—He visits Leeds and Glasgow.—Stirring Addresses on the Reform Question.



It was naturally to be expected that when Lord Russell acceded to office upon the death of Lord Palmerston, towards the close of 1865, the question of Reform would be dealt with, and that in no perfunctory spirit. Lord Derby twitted the new Prime Minister with his old character of 'Finality John,' alleging that he had always understood he would not disturb the settlement of 1832; but Lord Russell had long felt that a further and a large extension of the suffrage was inevitable. This question of Parliamentary Reform was one of great difficulty, and many predicted that it would

involve the fate of the Administration; but the Russell Ministry lost no time in avowing that they considered the immediate proposal of such a measure was due to their own consistency, to the just expectations of the country, and, moreover, to the obligations of political morality. The Reform struggle which now ensued is a memorable one in our political and Parliamentary annals; it gave rise to a display of eloquence on both sides of the House of Commons unsurpassed even during the great historic period of 1832.

Before dealing with the measure of the Russell-Gladstone Government, however, there are some preliminary events which demand our attention. In January 1865, Mr. Bright paid a visit to his constituents at Birmingham, being received with remarkable enthusiasm. On the 2nd the new Birmingham Exchange was opened. The hon. member, speaking at the luncheon subsequently given, expressed his belief that manufacturers and merchants, as a rule, had generally been either too modest or not sufficiently acquainted with their true position. From the commercial classes, and not from monarchs or great lords of the soil, had come whatever there was of social, or civil, or religious freedom to the inhabitants of this country. 'My opinion is,' he added, 'looking at the course of history, that merchants and manufacturers, in the aggregate, are gradually becoming much more important in the world than warriors and statesmen—and even than monarchs themselves, for it is obvious to me that the power of these heretofore great authorities is waning, and that in every part of the world the power of the great industrial interest is sensibly increasing.' Dealing with the subject of strikes, Mr. Bright said he was not sure that they should be altogether abandoned. 'I call the power to strike among workmen a reserve power, which, under certain circumstances, it may be their duty to exercise. At the same time, I think that, in my experience, in nineteen cases out of twenty, at least, the exercise of that power may be fairly questioned; and in many of these cases it has been a merciless curse to those by whom it has been exercised.'

On the 18th of January, Messrs. Scholefield and Bright addressed their constituents in the Town Hall, when there were some five thousand persons present. The Mayor, Mr. H. Wiggin, presided.

Mr. Bright, in his lengthy speech, dealt almost exclusively with the Reform question. At the outset, he referred to the escape we had had from a war on account of Denmark, which he had strongly condemned and deprecated a year before. Whether England owed the chances of peace to the Queen, the younger members of the Cabinet as led by Mr. Gladstone, or to the moneyed interests of the country, he was equally grateful. But the time had been one of great danger, seeing that the aged statesmen at the head of the Government—Lords Palmerston and Russell—were the men who had been mainly responsible for the Crimean war. During the past session, when the question was discussed, the Government exhibited its usual feebleness, and the Opposition its usual folly. Mr. Bright observed that only twelve years ago Lord Russell pledged England to defend all weaker nations, and to take care that nobody was molested in any part of the globe; and if they were to take Lord Palmerston's speeches, they would probably find a cartload of rhetorical rubbish of the same character. But notwithstanding that he (Mr. Bright) and Mr. Cobden had been reviled for holding a different view, all this warlike policy had now been entirely abandoned and overturned. The whole thing had gone to that receptacle to which all lies and superstitions would ultimately go.

Taking the events of the last few years, he was not much mistaken in pronouncing the theory of the balance of power to be pretty nearly dead and buried. 'This balance of power,' said Mr. Bright, amid loud cheering, 'rises up before me when I think of it as a ghastly phantom which during one hundred and seventy years, whilst it has been worshipped in this country, has loaded the nation with debt and with taxes, has sacrificed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Englishmen, has desolated the homes of millions of families, and has left us, as the great result of the profligate expenditure which it has caused, a doubled peerage at one end of the social scale, and far more than a doubled pauperism at the other. I am very glad to be here to-night, amongst other things to be able to say that we may rejoice that this foul idol—fouler than any heathen tribe ever worshipped—has at last been thrown down, and that there is one superstition less which has its hold upon the minds of English

statesmen and of the English people.' This being so, there was no necessity whatever for the constant increase in our military expenditure, which was already double that thought necessary by the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel.

Coming to the great question of the day, that of Reform, Mr. Bright observed that it was not dead, and he thus enforced the necessity for dealing with the subject :—

'An Englishman, if he goes to the Cape, can vote; if he goes further, to Australia, to the nascent empires of the New World, he can vote; if he goes to the Canadian Confederation, he can vote; and if he goes to those grandest colonies of England not now dependent upon the English Crown, there, in twenty free, and, in the whole, in thirty-five different States, he can give his free and independent vote. (Cheers.) It is only in his own country, on his own soil, where he was born, the very soil which he has enriched with his labour and with the sweat of his brow, that he is denied this right which in every other community of Englishmen in the world would be freely accorded to him. (Much cheering.)

'I agree very much with the gentlemen of the Torquay dinner, not as to the quality of the dinner—(laughter)—but as to that apparition which seemed to alarm even their formidable and robust digestion. (Laughter.) This apparition is not a pleasant one. This state of things I hold to be dangerous, and one that cannot last. It may happen, as it happened thirty years ago, that the eyes of the five millions all through the United Kingdom may be fixed with an intense glare upon the doors of Parliament; it was so in the years 1831–32. There are men in this room who felt then, and know now, that it required but an accident—but one spark to the train, and this country would have been in the throes of revolution; and these gentlemen who are so alarmed now lest a man who lives in a £10 house in a county, and a £6 house in a borough, should have a vote, would have repented in sackcloth and ashes that they had ever said one word or given one vote against Lord Grey's Reform Bill. (Applause.) I say that accidents always are happening, not to individuals only, but to nations. It was the accident of the French Revolution of 1830 that preceded that great movement in this country. You may have accidents again, but I do not hold that to be statesmanship which allows the security, the tranquillity, the loyalty of a people to be disturbed by any accident which they are able to control. (Cheers.) If the five millions should once unitedly fix their eyes with an intense look upon the door of that House where my hon. friend and I expect so soon to enter, I would ask who shall say them nay? Not the mace upon the table of the House; not the four hundred easy gentlemen of the House of Lords who lounge in and out of that decorated chamber; not the dozen gentlemen who call themselves statesmen, and who meet in Downing Street—(loud laughter)—perhaps not even those more appalling and more menacing personages who have their lodgment higher up Whitehall. I say there is no power in this country, as opinion now stands, and as combination is now possible, there is no power in this country that can say "Nay" for one single week to the five millions, if they are intent upon making their way within the

doors of Parliament. This is the apparition which frightens the gentlemen at Torquay.' (Cheers.)

But the apparition gave trouble in other quarters to which he (the speaker) would pay more respect. He then referred to Mr. Charles Buxton's plan of doubling the votes of a man who lived in a house above £10 rental, and Lord Grey's plan of the cumulative vote—both of which he strongly condemned. Referring to the latter, Mr. Bright excited great laughter by saying that he had heard of donkey-races where the last wins. So in this case, the slowest animal would run off with the prize. Having touched upon some other fancy propositions by Lord Grey, the hon. member observed that he did propose some things which were right. He would extend the suffrage, and he would abolish many, if not all, of the very small boroughs.

After an argument in favour of the rights of majorities, Mr. Bright said he wanted to know whence all this fear of the people came. It did not exist elsewhere, and he gave illustrations of this in connection with the exercise of the franchise. In the State of New York alone 700,000 men voted at the last Presidential election, and throughout the whole of the Free States not less than 4,000,000 votes were given, and they were all given with the most perfect order and tranquillity throughout the whole of the States. But some feared the legislative results of a wide extension of the franchise, and the hon. member showed the groundlessness of this citing South Africa, Australia, the British North American provinces, and the States of the American Union, where life and property were just as secure as in this country, and where education was more extended, and the religious and general interests of the population better looked after. There was a great deal of talk about 'our institutions,' which were only regarded as safe so long as they were in the hands of the institutions themselves. 'If the great patronage of our vast expenditure is to be dispensed perpetually amongst the ruling class, the ruling class as a matter of course will take extreme care of the patronage. There is something very sacred in that patronage. There are many families in this country with long lines of ancestry,

who, if patronage were curtailed, would feel very much as some of us feel in Lancashire when the American war has stopped our supplies of cotton. They look upon patronage as a holy thing, not to be touched by profane hands. I have no doubt they have in their minds the saying of a great friend of mine, though he is an imaginary character—I mean Hosea Biglow, the author of the *Biglow Papers*. He says—

“It is something like a fulfilling the prophecies,
When all the first families have all the best offices.”

But, sir, I protest against this theory. I protest against the theory that the people of this country have an unreasonable and violent desire to shake or overturn institutions which they may not theoretically approve of. Either the institutions which people were so much afraid of were in themselves unpopular or hurtful, or else the people themselves were grossly slandered.

Mr. Bright went on to remark that the House of Commons was in reality the only guarantee we had for freedom. The noblemen and gentlemen at Torquay did not know apparently that it was only because of this representative body—which stood between them and monarchical or aristocratic despotism—that the institution they were themselves so fond of was safe and permanent at all. Representation was found in the various countries of Europe, America, and Australia ; and Englishmen, everywhere but at home, were received into the bosom of this great permanent undying institution, this safeguard for national, for human freedom. The speaker then arrived at his peroration :—

‘Now, sir, I would change all this. I speak out of no hostility to any class or any institution. That man who proposes to exclude permanently five millions of his countrymen from the right which the constitution of his country makes sacred in his eyes, I say that is the man that separates Englishmen into two nations, and makes it impossible that we should be wholly or permanently a contented people. I demand, then, this, which is but the right of our constitution, that the House of Commons shall be made freely and fairly to represent the Commons and the people of the United Kingdom. England has long been famous for the enjoyment of personal freedom by her people. They are free to think, they are free to speak, they are free to write ; and England has been famed of late years, and is famed now the world over, for the freedom of her industry and the greatness and the freedom of her

commerce. I want to know then why it is that her people should not be free to vote. ("Hear, hear," and applause.) Who is there that will meet me on this platform, or will stand upon any platform, and will dare to say, in the hearing of an open meeting of his countrymen, that these millions for whom I am now pleading are too degraded, too vicious, and too destructive to be entrusted with the elective franchise? (Cheers.) I at least will never thus slander my countrymen. I claim for them the right of admission, through their representatives, into the most ancient and most venerable Parliament which at this hour exists among men; and when they are thus admitted, and not till then, it may be truly said that England, the august mother of free nations, herself is free.' (Loud applause.)

On the death of Mr. Cobden, there was a wish on the part of his Rochdale constituents to offer the seat to Mr. Bright, but the latter remained faithful to his friends at Birmingham. Mr. T. B. Potter was consequently selected by the Rochdale Liberals, and in supporting his candidature, Mr. Bright said that if he might speak for him who was here no longer, the choice was one which would have been grateful to him. He also thus alluded to Mr. Brett, the Conservative candidate: 'These men are all in favour of the good that has been done by men who have given years of their lives—men you have encouraged from youth to manhood, in the spread of just principles and the establishment of wise laws, and who have done all this in the teeth of the combined opposition of all the Mr. Bretts in England. Then the Mr. Bretts come forward, and say that the repeal of the Corn Laws was a good thing, and the French Treaty a valuable measure, and the freedom of the press a great blessing; but still Mr. Brett stands with Lord Derby; and if you will ask him about any one single question—not of the past, but of the future—of the next twenty years, you will have to fight as great a fight for every future good against the Mr. Bretts, just as you have fought against his class and order of mind during the last twenty years.' The Liberal candidate was elected by a large majority, the numbers being—for Mr. Potter, 646; Mr. Brett, 496.

Parliament was dissolved early in July, and Mr. Bright immediately issued his address to the electors of Birmingham. 'The Administration,' he wrote, 'which in 1859 climbed into office under the pretence of its devotion to the question of Parliamentary Reform, has violated its solemn pledges. Its chiefs have purposely betrayed the cause they undertook to defend, and the less eminent

members of it have tamely acquiesced in that betrayal. The Ministry have for six years held office, which, but for promises they made, and which they have broken, they could not have obtained possession of even for a day. . . . The Parliament is about to expire—the Ministry will soon undergo such changes as will make it totter to its fall ; but the question of Reform lives, and at this moment in the eyes of its opponents takes a more distinct shape than at any other period since the passing of the bill of 1832. I trust that the result of the coming general election will show that, notwithstanding the treachery of official statesmen, and the indifference of the expiring Parliament, the course of freedom, based on a true representation of the nation, is advancing with an irresistible force to its final triumph.'

The nomination at Birmingham took place on the 12th of July, in the Town Hall, which was densely crowded. Mr. Scholefield was proposed by Mr. Ald. Phillips, and seconded by Mr. Jaffray ; and Mr. Bright was proposed by Mr. George Dixon, and seconded by Mr. Ald. Manton. The Mayor, having first asked, amid much laughter, whether there was any other candidate, declared the old members duly elected. Mr. Scholefield first returned thanks.

Mr. Bright then rose, and delivered a speech bristling with sharp points and phrases. The Reform question, he said, was the question of the hour, but the Prime Minister, in his address to the electors of Tiverton, said nothing about it, which was wise, considering what he had done in regard to it. The Tories were in favour of what they called a well-balanced proposition of Reform—which meant, so exactly balanced that nobody could tell that the scale was in the least degree altered, and that everything should be left exactly as it was. At the present time the number of county electors was nearly half as much again as the number of borough electors. Speaking of the opponents of Reform, he said,—‘ Reform is ahead, and they cannot conceal it ; they cannot deny it. It is, as the poet has said of death,

“The doom they dread, yet dwell upon.”

How do they now try to avoid this reform ? They try to alarm the middle class. They tell the shopkeeper, for example, that the

artisan will outvote him. They tell the ten-pounder to be very much afraid of the nine-pounder,—he is very doubtful; and the eight-pounder still worse; and when you get to the seven-pounders, and the six-pounders, the consequences may be fatal. (Laughter.) In point of fact, their whole object now is to set class against class.' (Cheers.)

Perhaps the most effective passage in Mr. Bright's address was this brilliant attack on Mr. Disraeli:—

'The complaint now is, and the danger, that the whole nation—20,000,000 persons, men, women, and children—have no direct representation in the House of Commons of a country whose great foundation of government is the representative system and the representative principle. Well, now, what is the answer which is made to this claim? It is this: the Prime Minister answers it by contemptuous silence; he has not referred to it in the long and carefully written address which he has issued, not only to the electors of Tiverton, but to the electors of the United Kingdom. Well, but what says Lord Derby, speaking through the mouth of his prophet Disraeli? (Laughter.) Why, he says, "lateral extension." He says to the great body of the working men—to these five millions, "It is true you are shut out; the Reform Bill was not satisfactory; the representation may be amended; your complaint is just; and we will admit—somebody else." (Laughter and applause.) Now, Mr. Disraeli is a man who does what may be called the conjuring for his party. (Laughter.) He is what, amongst a tribe of Red Indians, would be called "the mystery man." (Renewed laughter.) He invents phrases for them—and one of the phrases, the last and the newest, is this lateral extension of the franchise. Now, Mr. Disraeli is a man of brains, of genius, of great capacity for action, of a wonderful tenacity of purpose, and of a rare courage. He would have been a statesman if his powers had been directed by any noble principle or idea. (Laughter and applause.) But, unhappily, he prefers a temporary and worthless distinction as the head of a decaying party, fighting for impossible ends, to the priceless memories of services rendered to his country—(cheers)—and to freedom, on which only in our age an enduring fame can be built up. (Loud cheers.) Now, what is meant by lateral extension? It means this: that all below £10 householders are not to be admitted. Well, the present law admits all that are above £10 householders, and therefore it can only include those not now included, a few men, inconsiderable in the whole number, who are lodgers, or who are brothers or sons of housekeepers whose names are already on the register; and therefore it is quite clear that this is a miserable pretence and a delusion, and an insult of the most glaring kind to the great body of the people.' (Loud cheers.)

Even at this distance of time, and when Lord Beaconsfield has passed away, it will be admitted that there are many truthful lines in the above portrait sketched of him by Mr. Bright. The close of

the speech of the hon. member for Birmingham was very fine, and was received with almost a frenzy of enthusiasm. 'I believe the time is coming,' he observed—'nay, that we are upon its very threshold—when a large number of those hitherto excluded will be admitted, and we shall feel more than ever before that we are one nation and one people. Many of you have stood, as I have often stood, on the seashore, in an hour of quiet and of calm. No tempest drives the waves; the wind is but a whisper; and yet the tide comes on as by some latent and mysterious power. The loiterers on the beach are driven from point to point as the waves advance, and at length the whole vast basin of the ocean seems filled to the brim. So on this question: there is no violence, nor even menace of force; but opinion grows, its tide moves on; opposition, ignorant on the one hand, insolent on the other, falls back; and shortly we shall see barriers thrown down, privilege and monopoly swept away, a people enfranchised, and the measure of their freedom full. You have honoured me this morning by committing this great cause in part to my keeping. I may defend it feebly, I may fall from the ranks before it is won, but of one thing you may be sure, I shall never betray it.' A subsequent speaker well described this address as a splendid oration.

At the close of the general election it was found that there was a Liberal majority of 77. Within three months, however, of this event the popular Premier had passed away. Lord Palmerston died on the 18th of October, 1865, being only within two days of completing his eighty-first year. By his death the chief official stumbling-block in the way of the introduction of a Liberal Reform Bill was removed.

In December, Mr. Bright again addressed a great meeting of the inhabitants of Birmingham on the Reform question, concluding his address as follows: 'I speak not the language of party. I feel myself above the level of party. I speak, as I have ever endeavoured to speak, on behalf of the unenfranchised, the almost voiceless millions of my countrymen. Their claim is just, and it is constitutional. It will be heard. It cannot be rejected. To the outward eye monarchs and Parliaments seem to rule with an

absolute and unquestioned sway, but—and I quote the words which one of our old Puritan poets has left for us—

“There is on earth a yet auguster thing,
Veiled though it be, than Parliament or King.”

That auguster thing is the tribunal which God has set up in the consciences of men. It is before that tribunal that I am now permitted humbly to plead, and there is something in my heart—a small but an exultant voice—which tells me I shall not plead in vain.’ Mr. Bright, in this speech, incidentally spoke strongly in favour of land reform and Church disestablishment for Ireland.

On the 3rd of the following month of January, Mr. Bright also addressed a Reform meeting at Rochdale. He remarked that he had seen a paragraph cut from an Indian newspaper, which, describing the immensely extensive household of a native prince, stated that there were hundreds of what were called prophesying Brahmins in his establishment; and he thus utilised this fact: ‘A Brahmin is a Hindoo priest, and is of great authority. Now, I have no doubt whatever that there are prophesying Brahmins in the great Whig house somewhere, and I dare say they are foretelling all sorts of evils that may come from the passing of this bill. I venture to foretell Lord Russell that their counsels, if followed, will be not only perilous, but I believe they will be fatal counsels to him and his Government. There are in an old poem that I read with great pleasure many years ago—the *Faery Queen*—two lines which I think may teach us something in our present position—

“No fort so fencible, no wall so strong,
But that continual battery may rive.”

I feel certain that the fort of selfishness and monopoly cannot be held for ever, and that the walls of privilege cannot through all time resist the multitude that are gathering to the assault. In all the nations of the world of this day, I believe the powers of good are gaining steadily on the powers of evil. I think it is eminently so in this country. Let us take courage, then. We are endeavouring by constitutional means to compass a great constitutional end; to make Parliament not only the organ of the will, but the honest

and faithful guardian of the interests of all classes in the country. It is a great and noble purpose which we have set ourselves to achieve, but it is a purpose which cannot fail, if we are true to it and to ourselves.'

Parliament met on the 1st of February, 1866, but before the question of Reform could be proceeded with, two subjects of pressing importance occupied the attention of the House. These were the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act in Ireland and the Cattle Plague. Mr. Bright spoke at length on both these questions, but his observations with regard to Ireland we shall reserve for separate treatment. On the 12th of February Sir George Grey introduced the Government Bill for suppressing the cattle plague, whose ravages had become formidable and alarming. A long debate occurred upon the principle of compensating the owners of cattle which might be slaughtered under the powers of the bill for their losses. Mr. Bright said that in the present emergency he quite agreed in the absolute necessity, so far as farms were concerned, of enforcing a rigid isolation; but he differed from the proposal in the bill which left the power of widespread and indiscriminate slaughter to the local authorities. With compensation, he believed that the slaughter would be unnecessary and monstrous in amount. It was contrary to the principle adopted by Parliament on past occasions of public suffering to vote money out of taxes to remedy a misfortune of this kind; and it was a grievance which every taxpayer would complain of, if his money were applied to the compensation of well-to-do farmers and rich landowners who might suffer from the affliction. If that principle were carried out, it would tend to greater improvidence on the part of farmers than in past times. They would fancy that they were a class or order in the community which had especial claims upon the House—an opinion which, twenty years ago, was destructive of their independence and energy; and to encourage such an opinion among them would be most unfortunate.

Mr. Stuart Mill in the main agreed with Mr. Bright. Considerable changes were made in the bill, the Government withdrawing the clause imposing a 'cattle rate,' and throwing the

whole charge on the county and borough rate; and the measure rapidly passed through both Houses and received the Royal assent.

On the 12th of March, in a densely crowded House, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gladstone) brought forward the Government Reform Bill. It proposed first to create an occupation franchise in counties, including houses beginning at £14 rental and reaching up to £50; secondly, to introduce into counties the provision which copyholders and leaseholders within Parliamentary boroughs then possessed for the purpose of county votes; thirdly, a savings-bank franchise would be introduced; and, fourthly, it was proposed to place compound householders on the same footing as ratepayers. It was proposed to abolish tax- and rate-paying clauses, and to have one definite figure of clear annual value, which would admit a great number of persons then excluded from the franchise. These were the main features of the measure. The total number of new voters would be 400,000. Mr. Gladstone made a fervent appeal to the House to pass the bill; or, if issue were taken adversely upon it, he hoped it would be directly.

Debates of unusual power and eloquence arose in connection with this bill. It was opposed in the outset by Mr. Laing, Mr. Horsman, and Mr. Lowe, but welcomed by such tried friends of the working classes as Mr. Bright and Mr. Fawcett. The following passage from Mr. Lowe's speech on the introduction of the bill gave serious and lasting offence to the great body of the working classes of the country. 'You have had the opportunity,' he said, 'of knowing some of the constituencies of this country; and I ask, if you want venality, ignorance, drunkenness, and the means of intimidation—if you want impulsive, unreflecting, and violent people, where will you go to look for them—to the top or to the bottom?'

Mr. Bright spoke on the second night of the debate. He rose, he said, neither to defend himself from the unusual attack which had been made upon him by Mr. Lowe or Mr. Horsman, nor to enter into an elaborate defence of the bill. But one thing in the bill was highly satisfactory, viz., that both in what it did and the manner in which it proposed to do it, it was distinct, clear, without

any tricks—without semblance of giving anything in one clause, and then under a feeling of alarm withdrawing it in the next.

There were reasons why the House should readily agree to pass the bill. The proposal to give a vote to every occupier of a £7 house in a borough assimilated our law in this respect to the law of Scotland, where there were no rate-paying clauses; and the proposition, regarded in the light of the Reform Act of 1832, would ensure that efficacy which the people expected from that great measure when it passed both Houses of Parliament. Mr. Lowe could not refuse his assent to this, because if there were one thing except the classical times of antiquity to which he was more devoted than another, it was clearly the bill of 1832. Mr. Bright went on to say that when the present bill reached the Committee, he hoped to see the county franchise reduced from £14 to £10, as proposed by Lord Derby; and if the Opposition wished to obtain a triumph over the Government, and at the same time show their consistency, they would support such a proposition. As to the only point on which there was any great difference of opinion, the figure of the franchise in boroughs, he (the speaker) should be very happy if it happened that the working classes, in great numbers, should reach an occupancy of £7, so that ultimately it might be even equal to a household suffrage in the country. This bill would not be final, but it would do for a time. It had been said that this bill was his bill, but he had not been able to find a point of the measure which he had recommended. He never was in favour of a £6 franchise, and would never have proposed it; he believed in a household franchise. But a £7 franchise was offered, and beggars could not be choosers. The £10 limit was regarded by some as the salvation of the country, and all the present horrors arose because it was proposed to reduce the franchise in boroughs by £1 lower than was recommended by Mr. Henly and Mr. Walpole.

Mr. Bright condemned the savings-bank franchise, which he thought was the worst of all the fancy franchises ever proposed. He objected altogether to giving the franchise to one man, and shutting it out from another—that second man, it may be, being

far more heroic than the other. The system was liable to the utmost inequality, and to a species of fraud which could not be prevented. He did not believe that so many working men as was estimated would be placed upon the register by this measure—the numbers were greatly exaggerated. With reference to the course taken in the debate on the bill by Mr. Horsman and Mr. Lowe, the hon. member commented on the announcement by Mr. Lowe in 1859 of the expediency of reducing the franchise, and said the right hon. gentleman must have a very short memory when he trifled with the House. He was afraid that when men changed their opinions after fifty years of age, there was not much chance of their turning back again. He could not with much hope appeal to Mr. Lowe, or to his colleague Mr. Horsman, and he did not know whether he could appeal to Lord Elcho, who, with the exception of the member for Salisbury (Mr. Marsh), was the only member on the Liberal side of the House who cheered the sentiments of the two right hon. gentlemen. What was the reason that gentlemen who had been holders of office took this course with regard to the Government bill? He did not complain of men who were fond of office, though he could never comprehend the reason they liked it so much. Parodying a line or two of one of the most beautiful poems in the language, he might ask—

‘For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
That pleasing, anxious office e’er resigned,
Left the warm precincts of the Treasury,
Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind?’

What he complained of was that that which was deemed patriotism vanished with office; and there was a howl of despair because it was proposed to diminish the franchise in boroughs from £10 to £7. Mr. Bright then made this now memorable retort upon his opponents:—

‘The right hon. gentleman below me (Mr. Horsman) said a little against the Government and a little against the bill, but had last night a field-night for an attack upon so humble an individual as myself. The right hon. gentleman is the first of the new party who has expressed his great grief, who has retired into what may be called his political Cave of Adullam, and he has called about him every one that

was in distress, and every one that was discontented. The right hon. gentleman has been anxious to form a party in this House. There is scarcely any one on this side of the House who is able to address the House with effect, or to take much part in our debates, whom he has not tried to bring over to his party or cabal; and at last the right hon. gentleman has succeeded in hooking the right hon. gentleman the member for Calne. (Laughter.) I know there was an opinion expressed many years ago by a member of the Treasury bench and of the Cabinet, that two men would make a party. When a party is formed of two men so amiable, so discreet, as the two right hon. gentlemen, we may hope to see for the first time in Parliament a party perfectly harmonious, and distinguished by mutual and unbroken trust. (Cheers and laughter.) But there is one difficulty which it is impossible to remove. This party of two reminds me of the Scotch terrier, which was so covered with hair that you could not tell which was the head and which was the tail of it.' (Great laughter.)

Within the memory of the oldest member, the House was probably never so convulsed with laughter as at this description. But when the mirth had to some extent subsided, Mr. Bright returned to the charge, further transfixing his opponent Mr. Lowe, in a manner never to be forgotten.

'The right hon. member for Calne told us that he had some peculiar election experiences. There are men who make discord wherever they appear. (Cheers.) The right hon. gentleman on going down to Kidderminster got into some unpleasing altercation with somebody, and it ended with his having his head broken. (Laughter.) But I am happy to say, and the House will bear witness that, with regard to its power, that head is probably as strong now as before he took his leave of Kidderminster and went to Calne—a village in the west of England. The right hon. gentleman found on the list of electors at Calne a hundred and seventy-four names, of whom, according to the Blue Book, about seven were working men. I suppose three or four of them were probably keepers of shops, and some of those whom the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I think, improperly included in his list. When the right hon. member went down there, he found a tumult even more aggravated than at Kidderminster. They did not break his head, but they did something that in the eye of the law was much worse, for they shut up the police in the Town Hall, and the little mob of this little place had the whole game to themselves. The right hon. gentleman told us of the polypus, which takes its colour from the rock on which it lives, and he said that some hon. members take their colours from their constituencies. The constituency which the right hon. gentleman represents consists of a hundred and seventy-four men, seven of whom are working men; but the real constituent of the right hon. gentleman is a member of the other House of Parliament, and he could send in his butler or his groom, instead of the right hon. gentleman, to represent the borough. (Laughter.) I think in one sense—regarding the right hon. gentleman as an intellectual gladiator in this House—we are much indebted to the Marquis of Lansdowne that he did not do that.' (Renewed laughter and cheers.)

Mr. Bright next appealed to the patriotism of members, and exhorted them not to take that disparaging view of their countrymen which had been presented by Mr. Lowe and Mr. Marsh, who—presumably from their residence at the antipodes—seemed to take a Botany Bay view of the character of the great bulk of their countrymen. Was it possible to do a more perilous thing than make it appear that there was a gulf that should not be passed by legislation between the highest and most powerful and a portion of the middle classes, and the great body of the working people, who were really the heart of this great nation? Having enlarged upon the danger of resistance to so moderate a measure of enfranchisement, Mr. Bright observed, in conclusion, ‘Now, Sir, I said at the beginning that I did not rise to defend this bill. I rose for the purpose of explaining it. It is not a bill which, if I had been consulted by its framers, I should have recommended. If I had been a Minister, it is not a bill which I should have consented to present to the House. I think it is not adequate to the occasion, and that its concessions are not sufficient. But I know the difficulties under which Ministries labour, and I know the disinclination of Parliament to do much in the direction of this question. I shall give it my support because, as far as it goes, it is a simple and honest measure, and because I believe, if it becomes law, it will give more solidity and duration to everything that is good in the constitution, and to everything that is noble in the character of the people of these realms.’

This speech by Mr. Bright, while keeping well within the bounds of Parliamentary decorum, was felt to be most effective and withering in its retorts upon the anti-Reform party on the Liberal benches. The epithet of ‘Adullamites’ clung to this party henceforward, and by this name only were they known. The effect of the speech on the House was quite extraordinary—especially that part of it in which Mr. Bright replied to Mr. Horsman and Mr. Lowe.*

* We cannot forbear quoting the following passage from a description of the scene furnished by a correspondent of the *Scotsman*: ‘Brave, brawny, slow, self-possessed, the member for Birmingham positively revelled in his power, and smote his adversaries hip and thigh with the laughter of his audience. And it was all done so easily! No effort, no haste, no anger! The broad, comely, Saxon features were lit up by a genial and good-

Leave was given to bring in the bill, but Earl Grosvenor gave notice, that on the second reading he should move an amendment, to the effect that the House was of opinion that it was inconvenient to consider the bill for the reduction of the franchise until it had before it the whole scheme of the Government for the amendment of the representation of the people. Mr. Gladstone stated that the Government would not only resist this amendment, but would treat it as a vote of want of confidence.

In the meantime there was great agitation in the country, and meetings were held in many of the large towns in support of the Government measure. At Liverpool, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Duke of Argyll, and others attended a great Liberal demonstration called in defence of the scheme. Mr. Gladstone spoke with much force and eloquence, announcing that the Government staked their existence upon the bill. They had crossed the Rubicon, broken the bridge, and burned their boats behind them. A meeting was held at Birmingham, when a letter was read from Mr. Bright, in which he said, 'Parliament is never hearty for Reform, or for any good measure. It hated the Reform Bill of 1831 and 1832. It does not like the Franchise Bill now upon its table. It is to a large extent the offspring of landed power in the counties, and of tumult and corruption in the boroughs; and it would be

humoured smile; but otherwise, while the House roared, and every other sentence was the signal for a burst of laughter, prolonged beyond all usual limits of duration, the orator stood bland, calm, and unmoved. A gentle but expressive gesture of the right hand seemed to send forth winged words—banter, pleasantry, sarcasm—in one arrowy shower. Mr. Lowe could not help laughing. The grimmest Derbyites laughed as heartily as the youngest country squires. It was ungrateful of the Opposition to laugh so heartily at Mr. Lowe, for they had vociferously applauded his speech, and he has fairly set them up with arguments and fallacies for the session. Yet the truth must be told; and it is that they roared more vociferously at Mr. Bright's sallies against Mr. Lowe than even the hon. gentlemen below the gangway and around the right hon. gentleman, which is saying a very great deal indeed. Mr. Deputy-Speaker Dodson bit his lip, and in vain endeavoured to assume a look of unnatural and transcendent gravity. It was of no use! He was obliged to give way and laugh like the rest. The Chancellor of the Exchequer's face was lit up as if by forty smiles transmuted and condensed into one. Mr. Disraeli felt, perhaps, that Mr. Lowe's eye was upon him, and he was content to smile faintly and laugh with his eyes. It is said that the only man who did not smile was Mr. Horsman, and that even he tried and failed. Sitting on the bench just below Mr. Bright, he put up his face and tried to put him out by interruptions. But it is impossible to disconcert Mr. Bright; and in a minute or two Mr. Horsman's face wore a look of agony, as of a man sitting in a dentist's chair.'

strange if such a Parliament were in favour of freedom and of an honest representation of the people. But notwithstanding such a Parliament, this bill will pass if Birmingham and other towns do their duty.' After stigmatising the opposition as 'a dirty conspiracy,' he continued: 'What should be done, and what must be done, under these circumstances? You know what your fathers did thirty-four years ago, and you know the result. The men who, in every speech they utter, insult the working men, describing them as a multitude given up to ignorance and vice, will be the first to yield when the popular will is loudly and resolutely expressed. If Parliament Street, from Charing Cross to the venerable Abbey, were filled with men seeking a Reform Bill, as it was two years ago with men come to do honour to an illustrious Italian (Garibaldi), these slanderers of their countrymen would learn to be civil, if they did not learn to love freedom. At a meeting held at Manchester, Mr. Bright urged an immediate organisation for meetings and petitions—as men living in a free country, with representative institutions, determined to partake in some measure of that representation, and to be free.'

The debate on the second reading in the House of Commons began on the 12th of April, and extended over eight nights. Mr. Gladstone, in moving the second reading, defended the working classes against Mr. Lowe's charges, and concluded with an impassioned appeal to the House not to delay a settlement of the question. Earl Grosvenor moved his amendment, which was seconded by Lord Stanley. The speeches which followed on both sides were worthy of the House of Commons in its palmy days. Sir E. Bulwer Lytton spoke with much brilliancy against the bill, and was followed by Mr. J. S. Mill in its favour. Sir Hugh Cairns and Lord Elcho opposed the bill, the former with great effect from the Conservative point of view. Mr. Horsman delivered another diatribe against the measure; and, alluding to Mr. Gladstone's striking phrase that the Government had broken their bridges and burnt their boats, described them as beaten and desperate men.

Mr. Bright followed, speaking on the night of the 23rd. He began by apologising for having quoted two or three words as from

Mr. Lowe which were not used by that right hon. gentleman, although by so doing he had done him no substantial injustice. He then showed that Lord Stanley was in error in retorting upon him (Mr. Bright) a charge of conspiracy in connection with the debates on the China war and the Conspiracy Bill. From this he passed on to point out how perilous a thing it was that the heirs of two of the most powerful houses in the country (Lords Grosvenor and Stanley) should lead the opposition to this moderate measure. To the former he ventured to give this advice: 'The course that he is taking is a course which tends to separate important persons of the Whig party from the Liberal and popular party in this House and in the country; and if he should succeed in dissevering the most intelligent of the Whig nobility from the great popular party in the country—if he should transfer them to the other side, and put all the dukes and the nobles on one side of Parliament, and the popular party on the other—if the noble lord knows anything whatever of history, he will know this, that when the great popular party of a country are fighting by themselves against the nobles of a country, whatever their virtues and whatever their power—speaking of many of them—you may rely upon it that the popular party will win, and the nobles will go down.'

Mr. Bright maintained that the speeches of Lord Grosvenor and Lord Stanley rested on an opposition to the extension of the franchise; and of Lord Stanley's speech he observed that it showed an extraordinary distrust of the Government, of the House of Commons, and of the people; and that everything that was true in it was unimportant, and everything that was important was not true. Referring to the share attributed to himself in the separation of the two branches of the question, the hon. member stated that some seven years ago, in conversing with Lord Russell, he had remarked that the best mode of dealing with the subject was to bring in a Franchise Bill, and a few months back he had repeated the advice at a meeting at Rochdale. His reason for this was that the gist of all the pledges made on this subject was not to redistribute seats, but that at an early day the working classes should be admitted in some fair numbers to the franchise. The question of redistribution

did not affect any special class; the settlement of it was not necessary to do justice to any particular class; consequently, it was not so urgent as the extension of the franchise. Another reason was that this course lessened the chance of combining all classes of opposition to the bill; and the best justification was that, with one exception, no members for the small boroughs which were likely to be in Schedule A were spoken of as being expected to desert their party on this occasion. The very reason why the House was now called on to deal with Reform, was the sense entertained in the country that the number of electors was too small for a fair representation of the people; and as another proof of the predominant importance of the extension of the franchise, he instanced Mr. Disraeli's Reform Bill, which, though it admitted 500,000 new electors to the franchise, only redistributed fifteen seats; and he quoted from the speeches of Mr. Walpole and Mr. Henley, condemning that bill, as a warning to the Opposition that Mr. Disraeli and Lord Stanley were not safe guides in this matter.

Mr. Bright then proceeded to examine the present bill. He controverted the accuracy of the Government statistics as to the number of working men now possessing the franchise, and in support of his contention instanced the cases of Newark, Wakefield, and Stoke-upon-Trent: 'The Chancellor of the Exchequer says when this bill is passed there will be 330,000 working men upon the register. I say there will be 179,000. Call them, for easier recollection, 180,000. The newly-admitted by this bill will be 116,000. What will be the gross effect? The whole number of borough electors in England and Wales, if this bill should pass, upon the calculation of the Blue Book, will be 691,000, of whom 180,000 only, or about one-fourth, will be working men; and therefore that portion of the people which forms at least three-fourths of the whole population will only have one-fourth of the electoral power in the boroughs, and no power whatever worth reckoning in the constituencies of the counties. I think so much political trepidation—I will say so much political cowardice, if I may be allowed the use of that word—never was exhibited before as in the terror shown by the mover and seconder of this amendment, because

116,000 new voters amongst working men will be admitted, while more than 4,000,000 will be left out.'

Turning upon Sir E. Bulwer Lytton for his alarmist speech, Mr. Bright said :

'The right hon. baronet once held very different opinions from these. Many years ago he published a book called "England and the English." This is not a very profound, but it is a very amusing book, and I should like to read to the House a sentence which the right hon. gentleman put as a motto to the book, which motto, I think, he took from Ben Jonson. The words are—

"I am he
Have measured all the shires of England over,
For to these savages I was addicted
To search their nature and make odd discoveries."

The discovery which he had made up to 1860 was this: if you introduce artisans and working men between a £10 and £6 rental, you give the lion's share of the power of representation to the poverty and passion of the country. In his speech last week he did not treat the working men as if they were made up of poverty and passion, but he used generous words of them, and he told us how there was a tie not only of interest, but of respect and affection, between the rich and the labouring poor; and doubtless this language far more accurately stated his real opinion than when he said that between £6 and £10 the working men were represented by "poverty and passion." But to give them compliments of this kind, and not votes, seems to me to be a thing which will not be well received by the great body of the people, who are asking that at least some of them may be admitted to a representation in this House. It reminds me very much of a couplet which I am sure the right hon. gentleman will remember—

"He kicked them downstairs with such a sweet grace,
They may think he was handing them up." (Laughter.)

How is it to be conceived that after a speech full of such noble and generous sympathy, the right hon. gentleman concludes to throw all the weight of his character and influence into the side of a party which says little that is kind and generous of this class? [Loud Opposition cries of "No, no."] I will say, then, of a party which sometimes does say something generous of the working class, but never shows the slightest disposition to confer upon it any portion of political rights.' (Applause.)

The hon. member next described the operations of the Rochdale Co-operative Societies, mentioning that not above half a dozen men connected with the management of those extensive institutions possessed the franchise; and in dwelling upon the present position of the question he referred to the public meetings and the petitions in favour of the bill, arguing that if the middle classes had been of

opinion that it would produce all the evils predicated of it, they would have met and petitioned against it. Mr. Bright then enlarged with great force upon the importance of passing a moderate measure in a time of tranquillity ; and he denied, in contradiction to Sir Hugh Cairns, that the House of Commons had ever been based upon the representation of classes. He compared the position of the working classes with that of the negroes under recent legislation in the United States, and asked the House whether it was prepared for ever to keep the bolt in the door which excluded the people from constitutional rights. The bill might be rejected, but the Opposition could not deal satisfactorily with the question, and not to deal with it would be to increase their difficulties. There never was a question connected with the Liberal party which it was more in the interest of the Opposition to settle ; and in opposing this moderate scheme they were either misled by their leaders, or else had driven their leaders into a pernicious course.

Alluding to his own political conduct generally, Mr. Bright closed with this appeal one of the longest and most elaborate of his Parliamentary speeches :—

‘I have been misrepresented, and condemned, and denounced by hon. gentlemen opposite, and by not a few writers in their press. My conscience tells me that I have laboured honestly only to destroy that which is evil, and to build up that which is good. The political gains of the last twenty-five years, as they were summed up the other night by the hon. member for Wick (Mr. Laing), are my political gains, if they can be called the gains in any degree of any living Englishman.

‘And if now, in all the great centres of our population—in Birmingham with its busy district—in Manchester with its encircling towns—in the population of the West Riding of Yorkshire—in Glasgow and amidst the vast industries of the west of Scotland—and in this great Babylon in which we are assembled—if we do not find ourselves surrounded by hungry and exasperated multitudes—if now, more than at any time during the last hundred years, it may be said, quoting the beautiful words of Mr. Sheridan, that—

“Content sits basking on the cheek of toil”—

if this House, and if its statesmen, glory in the change, have I not as much as any living man some claim to partake of that glory ? I know, and every thoughtful man among you knows, and those gentlemen who sit on that bench and who are leading you to this enterprise, know that the policy I have urged upon the House and upon the country, so far as it has hitherto been accepted by Parliament, is a policy conservative of the public welfare, strengthening the just authority of Parliament, and adding from day to day fresh lustre and dignity to the Crown. And now, when I

speak to you and ask you to pass this bill—when I plead on behalf of those who are not allowed to speak themselves in this House—if you could raise yourself for this night, for this hour, above the region of party strife—if you could free yourselves from the pestilent atmosphere of passion and prejudice which so often surrounds us here, I feel confident that at this moment I should not plead in vain before this Imperial Parliament on behalf of the English constitution and the English people.’

This stirring peroration, beginning with a justifiable boast, was warmly received by the House. Another philippic came from Mr. Lowe, and the bill was also attacked with great energy by Lord Cranborne and Mr. Disraeli. Mr. Gladstone replied with a speech which ranks amongst his highest efforts. ‘You may drive us from our seats,’ he said; ‘you may bury the bill that we have introduced; but for its epitaph we will write upon its gravestone this line, with certain confidence in its fulfilment—

“*Exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor.*”

You cannot fight against the future. Time is on our side. The great social forces which move on in their might and majesty, and which the tumult of our debates does not for a moment impede or disturb—those great social forces are against you; they are marshalled on our side; and the banner which we now carry, though, perhaps, at some moment it may droop over our sinking heads, yet it soon again will float in the eye of heaven, and it will be borne by the firm hands of the united people of the three kingdoms, perhaps not to an easy, but to a certain and to a not far-distant victory.’

The division was taken at three o’clock in the morning, amid circumstances of the greatest excitement. The numbers read out by Mr. Brand were: For the second reading, 318; against, 313; majority for Government, 5. The announcement was received with loud cheers by the Ministerialists, followed by equally strong counter-cheering on the part of the Opposition. Just before the numbers were announced, strangers in the galleries rose in their seats—Conservative members sat upon the edges of benches—the crowd at the bar pushed its way half up the floor—the royal princes leaned forward in their inconvenient standing-place—and the officers of the House, participating in the universal excitement, had no eyes or ears for any breach of rule or order.

Government decided to go on with the Bill, and many subsequent divisions resulted in their favour; but on the 18th of June they were defeated on a crucial point. Lord Dunkellin having proposed an amendment in favour of a borough franchise based on rating instead of rental, the proposition was carried against the Ministry by 315 votes to 304. A scene of frantic enthusiasm was witnessed on the Opposition benches when Lord Dunkellin took from the clerk the paper containing the numbers. The reading of the figures was further followed by the waving of hats, the clapping of hands, and other signs of delight on the part of the opponents of the Government.

On the following day Lord Russell's Ministry resigned, and a Derby-Disraeli Administration was formed. The cause of Reform was put back, but, as Mr. Gladstone had eloquently predicted, its triumph was only delayed. The country once more became strongly moved on the question. On the 29th of June a Reform demonstration was held in Trafalgar Square, attended by about ten thousand people. It was proposed to hold also a great meeting in Hyde Park, but this was prohibited by the Government. Writing to the Council of the League respecting this prohibition, Mr. Bright said, 'You have asserted your right to meet on Primrose Hill and in Trafalgar Square. I hope after Monday night no one will doubt your right to meet in Hyde Park. If a public meeting in a public park is denied you, and if millions of intelligent and honest men are denied the franchise, on what foundation do our liberties rest, or is there in the country any liberty but the toleration of the ruling class? This is a serious question, but it is necessary to ask it, and some answer must be given to it.' On July 23, a riot occurred in Hyde Park, arising out of the official notice prohibiting the demonstration. Mr. Edmond Beales, and other prominent members of the Reform League, requested admission to the Park, which was denied them. They then returned to Trafalgar Square, where resolutions were passed urging the prosecution of lawful and constitutional means for the extension of the franchise, and thanking Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Bright, and others for being faithful to the cause which others had basely deserted. While this was taking place, a mob broke into Hyde

Park, and a serious encounter occurred between the populace and the police, quiet being ultimately restored by detachments of the Foot Guards and the Life Guards. The day's proceedings subsequently gave rise to much discussion, the conduct of the Home Secretary (Mr. Walpole) being severely canvassed. On the 8th of August a Reform meeting was held in the Guildhall, presided over by the Lord Mayor, when resolutions were carried in favour of manhood suffrage and the ballot.

During the recess, the Reform campaign was carried on with vigour. Perhaps the most remarkable of the many demonstrations which took place was that held at Brookfields, Birmingham, on the 27th of August, the numbers present being variously estimated at from 150,000 to 250,000. The *Birmingham Post* observed: 'Old Unionists tell us that the meeting in the Brookfields not only recalled and rivalled the best days of the famous Political Union, but excelled the greatest assemblages ever held under the auspices of the Union, and the presidency of Thomas Attwood. The enthusiasm, they say, was fully as decided, the character of the assemblage was as high, if not higher; while the numbers far exceeded any that the Political Union was able to bring together at one time. Such testimony may be accepted as conclusive; and Birmingham may plume itself upon having, twice in one century, led the van in a national agitation for Parliamentary Reform.' Six separate meetings were held, presided over by Mr. Baldwin, the Rev. A. O'Neil, Mr. Taunton, the Rev. T. H. Morgan, Mr. Alderman Sturge, and Mr. Thomas Wright. The speakers included Mr. Mason Jones, Mr. J. S. Wright, Mr. Edmond Beales, Mr. Rogers, Mr. George Potter, Col. Dickson, Mr. George Howell, and Mr. J. A. Partridge, in addition to the various chairmen named. Reform resolutions were passed with acclamation, and great enthusiasm was manifested for Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright at all the meetings.

In the evening a *soirée* was held in the Town Hall, attended by several thousand persons. The Mayor, Mr. E. Yates, presided at the subsequent public meeting, and there were present, amongst others, Mr. Scholefield, M.P., Mr. Bright, M.P., Mr. Cave, M.P., Col. Dickson, Mr. E. Beales, Mr. Mason Jones, Mr. Ernest Jones,

Mr. E. O. Greening, the Ven. Archdeacon Sandford, the Revs. G. B. Johnson, T. H. Morgan, J. Lord, F. W. Beynon, and H. E. Dowson; Aldermen Ryland, Sadler, Holland, Palmer, and Osborne; seventeen members of the Town Council; and Messrs. W. Middlemore, C. Sturge, J. Jaffray, G. Dixon, H. Manton, J. H. Chamberlain, J. S. Manton, J. A. Partridge, W. Morgan, J. S. Wright, J. T. Bunce, and Mr. G. Edmonds—the last-named gentleman, as one of the few living relicts of the great agitation of 1830-32, being vociferously cheered. Addresses were presented to the borough members.

Mr. Bright was the chief speaker at the meeting. He referred to the vast assemblies which had already been witnessed in London and Birmingham on the Reform question—assemblies such as had not been seen for a generation past. He next went through the erroneous estimate of the late Government as to the numbers of working men proposed to be admitted under their bill, and showed that in the boroughs of England and Wales only 200,000 would have been admitted. He quoted Mr. Lowe's denunciation of the working classes, and condemned his policy, urging his hearers to press on in their agitation for restoring the British constitution with all its freedom to the British people. 'Working men in this hall,' he continued, 'I wish my voice had been loud enough to have said what I am about to say to the vast multitude which we looked on this day; but I say it to them through the press, and to all the working men of this kingdom,—I say that the accession to office of Lord Derby is a declaration of war against the working classes. The course taken in London the other day by the police, and it had almost been by the military, is an illustration of the doctrines and the principles of the Derby Administration. They reckon nothing of the constitution of their country.'

The hon. gentleman further observed, 'You are to be told that you are so ignorant and so venal, so drunken, so impulsive, so unreflecting, and so disorderly, that it is not even safe to skim off, as it were, the very cream of you to the number of 116,000, or it may•be of 204,000, and to admit these to a vote for members of the House of Commons. This is the Tory theory. This is the

faith of Lord Derby and his party.' Then came this amusing description of Lord Derby's Ministry, which was received with roars of laughter: 'The Government of Lord Derby in the House of Commons sitting all in a row reminds me very much of a number of amusing and ingenious gentlemen whom I dare say some of you have seen and listened to. I mean the Christy Minstrels. The Christy Minstrels, if I am not misinformed, are, when they are clean-washed, white men; but they come before the audience as black as the blackest negroes, and by this transformation it is expected that their jokes and songs will be more amusing. The Derby minstrels pretend to be Liberal and white; but the fact is, if you come nearer and examine them closely, you will find them to be just as black and curly as the Tories have ever been. I do not know, and I will not pretend to say, which of them it is that plays the banjo and which the bones. But I have no doubt that, in their manœuvres to keep in office during the coming session, we shall know something more about them than we do at present; they are, in point of fact, when they pretend to be Liberal, mere usurpers and impostors.'

Mr. Bright said that he was not afraid of the principles of the Reform League. He had no fear of manhood suffrage, and no man was more a friend of the ballot than he was. After exhorting his hearers to constant effort in their great work, he thus concluded his speech, the applause when he sat down being again and again renewed: 'The address which has been presented to me has referred to 1832. I remember that time well. My young heart then was stirred with the trumpet-blast that sounded from your midst. There was no part of this kingdom where your voice was not heard. Let it sound again. Stretch out your hands to your countrymen in every part of the three kingdoms, and ask them to join you in a great and righteous effort on behalf of that freedom which has been so long the boast of Englishmen, but which the majority of Englishmen have never yet possessed. I shall esteem it an honour which my words cannot describe, and which even in thought I cannot measure, if the population which I am permitted to represent should do its full duty in the great struggle which is

before us. Remember the great object for which we strive. Care not for calumnies and lies. Our object is this—to restore the British constitution in all its fulness, with all its freedom, to the British people.’

Manchester followed Birmingham, and on the 24th of September a demonstration was held in Campfield, at which were present a vast number of persons, estimated at from eighty to a hundred thousand. In the evening a great meeting was held in the Free Trade Hall. The *Manchester Examiner* of the following day stated that long before the appointed time for the commencement of the proceedings, every part of the building was so crowded that it was impossible to find standing-room. It was therefore determined that the business should be at once proceeded with. The appearance of Mr. T. B. Potter, Mr. (now Sir) Wilfrid Lawson, Mr. Edmond Beales, Mr. Ernest Jones, and other well-known Reformers, was the signal for loud and prolonged cheering. After an interval of eager waiting, Mr. John Bright, M.P., appeared upon the platform, and thereupon ensued such a scene as had not been witnessed in Manchester for many years. The entire mass of the audience saluted Mr. Bright with cheers, and waving of hats and handkerchiefs; and the band played the tune of ‘Auld Lang Syne.’ Instantly the appropriateness of this chorus to the renewal of intercourse between Mr. Bright and his former constituents was perceived, and the entire audience joined as one man in singing the chorus, taking it up and repeating it again and again, and concluding by saluting Mr. Bright with a hearty cheer. Mr. T. B. Potter, M.P., took the chair; and amongst those present, besides the gentlemen named above, were Mr. B. Whitworth, M.P., Mr. Fildes, M.P., Mr. George Wilson, Mr. Jacob Bright, Sir James Watts, Mr. Wright Turner, the Rev. Thomas Binney, Prof. Rogers, Mr. B. Armitage, the Rev. Dr. Parker, Ald. Carter of Leeds, Ald. Ashworth of Rochdale, Prof. Greenbank, Rev. S. A. Steinthal, Mr. Samuel Watts, the Hon. Lyulph Stanley, &c. An address was presented to Mr. Bright, and in his reply the hon. gentleman again advocated a large extension of the franchise, with the protection of the ballot. He sharply attacked Lord Derby and his friends,

charging them with having set class against class. They had done much also to separate the Parliament from the nation; they had made the House of Commons the reviler instead of the protector of the people; and they had frustrated the just and beneficent intentions of the Crown. These men could not govern Britain; the working classes and the middle classes would alike condemn them. They could not govern Ireland, for in that unhappy country their policy had begotten a condition of chronic insurrection which they could not cure. They would be excluded from power, and their policy rejected by the people, for it was on broad and just and liberal principles alone that England could maintain her honourable but now unchallenged place amongst the great nations of the world.

At a banquet held on the following day at the Albion Hotel, Mr. Bright said that those great meetings were not so much meetings for discussion as meetings for demonstration. Alluding to the abstract right to use force in the last resort, he observed that it was no more immoral thus to use force for the obtaining and securing of freedom, than it was for the Government to use force to suppress and deny that freedom. But he hoped the time would never come when it would be necessary to consider questions of that nature; he thought this question was settled in 1832. And since then liberty had grown. 'The point at which we have now arrived of political liberty and instruction and of civilisation permits us to believe that there is nothing we can fairly claim, nothing that could do us good, that cannot be obtained by that grand and peaceful movement of which the meetings of the last few days have formed so eminent and useful a part.'

We next find Mr. Bright in the West Riding of Yorkshire. On the 8th of October he attended a meeting in the Leeds Town Hall, where he was received with great enthusiasm, the meeting rising *en masse* to welcome him. In accepting the address presented to him, he observed that some writers complained that at Manchester he had said very much the same thing that he had said at Birmingham. He believed that a charge of that nature was brought more than two thousand years ago against one of the wisest of the ancients.

They said that he was always saying the same thing about the same thing; and he asked them in return whether they expected him to say a different thing about the same thing. Well, when the critics had answered what he had already said about reform, he would endeavour to tell them something new. The case was a very simple one—the House of Commons had no pretence whatever for its existence except that it spoke for the nation, of which it was a part. If it spoke for only one out of six or seven of the people, it was no fair representation of the nation. Mr. Bright illustrated the inequalities in representation by citing several cases of small boroughs. The member for Stamford (Lord Cranborne), who sat for Stamford by favour of the Marquis of Exeter, had assailed Mr. Gladstone with great animosity because he had said that the great body of the unenfranchised men of England were worthy of consideration, for they were our own flesh and blood. They were resolved to alter the existing condition of things—to restore in fact the representation, and to restore the fair and free action of the English constitution. There was a spirit created in London, in Birmingham, in South Lancashire, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, in the Newcastle and Durham district, in Glasgow and the west of Scotland—there was a power rising which, fairly combined, could do all this. He said to the working classes, rely mainly upon yourselves, for you are the great nation excluded. Mr. Bright closed with this happy reference to the Atlantic cable, which had been successfully laid: ‘It was towards the end of the fifteenth century that the grand old Genoese discovered the new world. A friend of mine, Cyrus W. Field, of New York, is the Columbus of our time, for after no less than forty passages across the Atlantic in pursuit of the great aim of his life, he has at length, by his cable, moored the new world close alongside the old. To speak from the United Kingdom to the North American Continent, and from North America to the United Kingdom, is now but the work of a moment of time, and it does not require the utterance even of a whisper. The English nations are brought together, and they must march on together. The spirit of either Government must be the same, although the form may be different. A broad and generous freedom is the heritage of England,

and our purpose is this, to establish that freedom for ever on the sure foundation of a broad and generous representation of the people.'

Going north from Leeds, on the 15th Mr. Bright arrived at Glasgow, there to continue the campaign. An imposing demonstration took place on the 16th, a procession of many thousands of the friends of Reform parading the streets, and ultimately forming into a great meeting on Glasgow Green. The numbers present at the demonstration were enormous. In the evening, an overflowing and enthusiastic meeting was held in the City Hall, and an address was presented to Mr. Bright. In his reply, he put the question then agitating the country to be—whether in future the government and the legislation of the country should be conducted by a privileged class in a sham Parliament, or on the principles of the constitution of the nation, through its representatives, fairly and freely chosen. He had no fear of manhood suffrage, and no man was more a friend of the ballot than he was. Mr. Bright recommended that the passages from Mr. Lowe's celebrated and unhappy speech attacking the working classes should be printed upon cards, and hung up in every factory, workshop, and club-house, and in every place where working men were accustomed to assemble. They must rouse the spirit of the people against these slanderers of a great and noble nation. The speaker pointed out that there were 254 boroughs in the United Kingdom, and only 54 of these possessed a constituency of 2000 electors and upwards. Out of every hundred grown men in the United Kingdom, eighty-four had no votes. For all purposes of constitutional government those eighty-four might as well live in Russia. One-third of the House of Commons, or 220 members, were actually elected by 70,000 votes—that is to say, that 220 members of the House of Commons were chosen by a number of men scattered over the country, who were fewer by almost one-half than the number of grown men in the city of Glasgow alone. And further one-half of the House of Commons was chosen by about 180,000 electors, being only one-seventh of the whole number of electors, and much below the number of men who were to be found in the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Having referred to the corruption which prevailed under the existing electoral system, Mr. Bright came to the following passage in his speech, which subsequently caused much commotion amongst the anti-Reformers in the House and in the press :—

‘Now, if the Clerk of the House of Commons were placed at Temple Bar, and if he had orders to tap upon the shoulder every well-dressed and apparently clean-washed man who passed through that ancient bar, until he had numbered six hundred and fifty-eight ; and if the Crown summoned these six hundred and fifty-eight to be the Parliament of the United Kingdom, my honest conviction is that you would have a better Parliament than now exists. This assertion will stagger some timid and some good men ; but let me explain myself to you. It would be a Parliament, every member of which would have no direct constituency, but it would be a Parliament that would act as a jury that would take some heed of the facts and arguments laid before it. It would be free, at any rate, from the class prejudices which weigh upon the present House of Commons. It would be free from the overshadowing presence of what are called noble families. It would owe no allegiance to great landowners, and I hope it would have fewer men amongst it seeking their own gains by entering Parliament.’

Mr. Bright proceeded to substantiate his views on this matter by the course which had been adopted by the Protectionists—who refused to be convinced until the occurrence of the terrible famine in Ireland—and other facts. He next referred to the Land Laws, observing that half the land of England was in the possession of fewer than one hundred and fifty men, and half the land in Scotland in the possession of not more than ten or twelve men. The result was the gradual extirpation of the middle class, and the constant degradation of the tillers of the soil. He hoped that Scotchmen would lead the way in the deliverance of the farmers from their present slavery. Mr. Bright then touched upon the ignorance amongst the agricultural population of England, and pointed out that in the United Kingdom there were more than 1,200,000 paupers. There was so great a mass of misery that benevolence could not reach it. It was not benevolence, but justice, that could deal with giant evils. The hon. gentleman next condemned the proposed increase in the naval expenditure, and remarked upon the inequality of the taxation of the country. He admitted that good things had been done by Parliament, but they had sprung from the people, and the people had really carried them. He was in favour

of a system of legislation by all for all, as they would then have an average. If they could add another million to the existing voters, they would modify the constituencies, and they would be less open to management. Further, Parliament would not then revile and slander the people; nor would it cheer with frantic violence when their countrymen were described in hideous and hateful colours. What might be called the Botany Bay view of their countrymen would be got rid of, and a sense of greater justice and generosity towards the bulk of the nation would take its place. Having asked whether there were any ministers of religion amongst his audience, Mr. Bright closed his stirring address with this appeal:—

‘An eminent man of your country, the late Dr. Chalmers, in speaking of the question of Free Trade, and particularly of the struggle for the abolition of the Corn Laws, uttered some memorable words. He said he thought there was nothing that would tend so much to sweeten the breath of British society as the abolition of the Corn Laws. I believe now that there is nothing which would tend so much to sweeten the breath of British society as the admission of a large and generous number of the working classes to citizenship and the exercise of the franchise. Now, if my words should reach the ears and reach the heart of any man who is interested in the advancement of religion in this country, I ask him to consider whether there are not great political obstacles to the extension of civilisation and morality and religion within the bounds of the United Kingdom. We believe—these ministers, you, and I—we believe in a Supreme Ruler of the Universe. We believe in His omnipotence; we believe and we humbly trust in His mercy. We know that the strongest argument which is used against that belief, by those who reject it, is an argument drawn from the misery, and the helplessness, and the darkness of so many of our race, even in countries which call themselves civilised and Christian. Is not that the fact? If I believed that this misery, and this helplessness, and this darkness could not be touched or transformed, I myself should be driven to admit the almost overwhelming force of that argument; but I am convinced that just laws, and an enlightened administration of them, would change the face of the country. I believe that ignorance and suffering might be lessened to an incalculable extent, and that many an Eden, beauteous in flowers and rich in fruits, might be raised up in the waste wilderness which spreads before us. But no class can do that. The class which has hitherto ruled in this country has failed miserably. It revels in power and wealth, whilst at its feet, a terrible peril for its future, lies the multitude which it has neglected. If a class has failed, let us try the nation. That is our faith, that is our purpose, that is our cry—Let us try the nation. This it is, which has called together these countless numbers of the people to demand a change; and as I think of it, and of these gatherings, sublime in their vastness and in their resolution, I think I see, as it were, above the hill-tops of time, the glimmerings of the dawn of a better and a nobler day for the country and for the people that I love so well.’

Speaking on the following morning at a public breakfast given to him at the Cobden Hotel, Glasgow, Mr. Bright reiterated his strong desire that Scotland should make itself felt in the great movement. He also referred to the mighty awakening in England; and with regard to his own prominent position in the agitation, said that it had been altogether unsought by him. He had no anxiety to be a leader in politics, or to be lionised in great cities; but from his youth upwards he had had a horror and a hatred of that which was unjust to the people. It was that feeling,' he observed, 'which led me to join one of whom I cannot speak without a faltering voice (Mr. Cobden) in that great labour in which we worked so long together, the abolition of the monopoly in food; and now if I am engaged more prominently than some men may think I ought to be in this question, it is because I would wish to join my countrymen in striking down monopoly of a wider influence, and which when it is gone, ten or twenty years afterwards, all thoughtful and good men in the country will rejoice at as much as they now rejoice that the monopoly, the stupid and ignorant monopoly, of the landowners no longer limits the supply of food to a great people.'

We must reserve the remainder of Mr. Bright's speeches during this vigorous Reform campaign, together with our account of the Derby-Disraeli Reform Bill, for another chapter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE REFORM BILL CARRIED.

Mr. Bright's Reform Speeches.—An arduous Campaign.—He visits Ireland.—Speeches at Dublin.—Reform Banquet in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester.—Mr. Bright on the Inequalities of the Suffrage.—Lord Derby and his Party and the Reform Question.—Trades' Demonstration at Kensington.—Meeting in St. James's Hall.—Speech of Mr. Bright.—Forcible Pleas for Reform.—The Question pressing for settlement.—Mr. Bright's Defence of the Queen.—He is himself misrepresented and slandered.—Reply to Mr. Garth, M.P.—Workmen's Address of Sympathy with Mr. Bright.—Reform in 1867.—League Demonstration in London.—Mr. Disraeli introduces the Government Scheme in the House of Commons.—The Resolutions being opposed, are withdrawn.—New Measure resolved upon by the Cabinet.—Resignation of three of the Ministers.—Mr. Disraeli introduces the New Reform Bill.—It is severely criticised by Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright.—Demonstrations during the Easter Recess.—Mr. Bright on Mr. Gladstone's Leadership.—Reform League Meeting in Hyde Park.—Mr. Bright on Voting Papers.—The Bill in the House of Lords.—Important Amendments.—Lord Cairns's Minority Clause.—It is warmly opposed by Mr. Bright.—The Reform Bill passes.—Its general Character.



HE work upon which Mr. Bright entered in the autumn of 1866, and which was completed in the following year, in connection with the Reform question, was amongst the most arduous he has undertaken during the whole course of his political life. Putting out of sight the physical wear and tear, and the strain upon the nervous system, which so much travelling and the attendance of so many meetings involved, the speeches he delivered formed in themselves an extraordinary intellectual effort. To discover new phases of a subject which had been so freely and exhaustively discussed as that of Reform, and to put these phases in fresh and

telling language, was a task which would have discouraged and embarrassed most men; but on examining these speeches now, after the lapse of fifteen years, we are struck by the variety of their arguments, the strength of their appeals, and the power of their eloquence. There has been no task accomplished by a living statesman which can be compared with that which Mr. Bright then achieved, save the wonderful and memorable campaign of Mr. Gladstone in Midlothian in 1879-80.

At the close of October, and within a fortnight of the delivery of his Glasgow address, Mr. Bright crossed over to Ireland. On the 30th he was entertained at a banquet in the Rotunda, Dublin, and on rising to respond to the toast of his health there was the same exhibition of enthusiastic feeling which had greeted him upon every English platform. His address on that occasion we shall deal with in a chapter devoted to purely Irish questions. It will suffice here to state that he advocated a wider suffrage for the Irish people as one very potent means of leading to a redress of their grievances. On the 31st the hon. gentleman received a deputation from the Cork Farmers' Club, by whom he was presented with an address thanking him for his services to Ireland, and for his efforts to improve the condition of the occupiers of the land. In reply, the hon. gentleman said that the whole tone of society in England had been wonderfully improved by the change which took place in 1846; and he believed that if in England and in Ireland the laws of political economy were applied to land, they would find just as great a change from this point forward with regard to matters which were influenced by laws affecting land, as they had found in past times by the abolition of the laws which prevented the importation of corn. A change of Government might do something towards bringing about a settlement of the land question, but he believed what they had most to rely on was a change in the representation of the people.

Mr. Bright also attended a meeting of the working men of Dublin, held in the theatre of the Mechanics' Institution, on the 2nd of November. Mr. James Haughton occupied the chair, and a address of welcome was presented to the member for Birmingham expressing the thanks of the working men of Ireland to him, and

stating that the Irish people had no hope of relief from an English House of Commons as at present constituted. Mr. Bright, in his reply, showed the great importance of Parliamentary Reform to Irishmen. The existing representation was very unequal, for there were twenty-seven boroughs in Ireland with only 9453 electors, while the county of Cork had 16,107 electors, and returned but two members. But that was not the worst, for many of these boroughs were too small for independence. The question of the ballot was of the greatest importance in Great Britain and Ireland, both in the counties and boroughs. Mr. Bright also dwelt upon the Church and the land questions, but his observations in connection with these subjects we reserve for the present.

In less than a month after leaving Ireland—that is, on the 20th of November, Mr. Bright attended a great Reform banquet in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester. It was organised by the National Reform Union, and several Liberal members of Parliament attended. This meeting was amongst the most striking and important held upon the question, and when Mr. Bright rose to address the gathering, he was received by the audience standing, their cheering continuing for several minutes.

Mr. Bright began by saying that the old taunt, that the working men felt no grievance in the matter of Reform, had been fully and satisfactorily answered. But now the critics turned round, and said that the middle class stood entirely aloof from the movement. He instanced what had occurred in Birmingham, Leeds, and Glasgow to the contrary; and added, ‘But if there was any question on this matter, I would ask those gentlemen to come on this platform to-night. Here is the largest and finest hall in Britain, the largest and finest hall in Europe, I believe the largest and finest hall in the world, and yet this hall is crowded with persons to whom our opponents, I think generally, unless they were very fastidious, would admit the term respectable and influential. I doubt if there has ever been held in this kingdom, within our time, a political banquet more numerous, more influential, more unanimous, more grand in every respect, than that which is held here to-night. Just now it was the fashion to flatter and to court the middle class, in

order to set it against the working class. And there was no greater fallacy than to say that the middle classes were in possession of power. The middle class have votes, but those votes are rendered harmless and nugatory by the unfair distribution of them, and there is placed in the voter's hand a weapon which has neither temper nor edge, by which he can neither fight for further freedom, nor defend that which his ancestors have gained.'

The speaker proceeded to show the unequal distribution of the suffrage, pointing out that of the 254 boroughs in the United Kingdom there were 145 with a population of under 20,000 each, and 109 with a population over that number. But the boroughs under 20,000 returned 215 members, against 181 returned by the boroughs over 20,000. Those boroughs with over 20,000 inhabitants, having 39 members fewer than the boroughs under 20,000, were in this position—their members represented six times as many electors, seven times as much population, and fourteen times as much payment of income-tax as the larger number of members represented. Even in the boroughs, therefore, the representative system was almost wholly delusive, and defrauded the middle classes of the power which the Act of 1832 professed to give them. As to the county representation, it was almost too sad a subject to dwell upon. But he was delighted to believe that the great body of the people were resolved that this state of things should no longer exist. An honest Government had made an honest attempt in the last session of Parliament to tinker the existing system, but the Tory party refused even to have it tinkered. His opinion was that the papers which professed to say what Lord Derby and his friends were going to do in the way of reform knew nothing about it, and that the Government were waiting to see what the weather would be.

Having alluded to the forthcoming London Trades' Demonstration, Mr. Bright replied to the views of those who thought that Lord Derby would bring in a good Reform Bill. 'They say that Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington carried Catholic Emancipation; that Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington repealed the Corn Law; and why should not Lord Derby pass a Reform Bill? Lord Derby is neither the Duke of Wellington nor Sir Robert Peel.

He deserted both those eminent men in 1846, rather than unite with them to repeal the Corn Law; and he has never shown, from that hour to this, one atom of statesmanship or one spark of patriotism that would lead us to expect that, on this occasion, he would turn round, and, neglecting his party, do something for his country.' The antecedents and speeches of Mr. Disraeli, Lord Stanley, Lord Cranborne, General Peel, and Sir Stafford Northcote were successively glanced at, and then the hon. gentleman added—

'I want to ask you whether from these men you are to expect, you are to wait for, with anxious and hopeful looking forward, any Reform Bill? And after all these speeches had been made, Lord Derby did his utmost to prevail upon Mr. Lowe to become a member of His Cabinet. If, after all this, they were to attempt to manufacture and introduce a Reform Bill, they would cover themselves and their party with humiliation. I know that in this country politicians change sides; office has a wonderful effect upon men. I suppose there are men here such as were described by our witty friend, Mr. Hosea Biglow, in painting the character of some politicians in America. He said of them, as we perhaps may say of Lord Derby and his party—

“ A merciful Providence fashioned them hollow,
On purpose that they might their principles swallow.”

But, notwithstanding that provision, that merciful provision, for statesmen, I confess I do not believe that the Government have determined to bring in a Reform Bill, or that they can by any possibility bring in a bill which the Reformers of this country can accept. They have done everything during the past session by fraudulent statements—by insults to the people—by the most evident baseness of party action—to destroy the moderate and honest attempt of Lord Russell to improve the representation. And I do not believe that in one short year they can turn round; and, capacious as may be the internal cavity of the Tory Government, I think they cannot in one short year swallow all their Conservative principles.'

He maintained that the enemies of the Bill of 1866 could not become the honest friends of Reform in 1867. He advised his listeners to be on the watch. In the next Reform measure they must see the franchise extended to all householders in boroughs. 'I believe that, if it were so extended,' he observed in conclusion, 'we should arrive at a point at which, so long as any of us are permitted to meddle with the politics of our country, no further change would be demanded. I therefore am entirely in favour of it, because I believe it to be wise in itself, and because it is the ancient borough franchise of this kingdom. I am in accord with our ancient consti-

tution. I would stand by it ; wherever it afforded support for freedom I would march in its track. That track is so plain that the wayfar- ing man, though a fool, need not err therein. I would be guided by its lights. They have been kept burning by great men among our forefathers for many generations. Our only safety in this warfare is in adhering to the ancient and noble constitution of our country. And when we have restored it to its bygone strength, and invited the great body of the people to take part in political power, then the House of Commons will be the servant of the nation, and not its master ; and it will do the bidding, not of a small, a limited, often an ignorant, necessarily a selfish class, but the bidding of a great and noble people.'

A great demonstration of the Trades Societies in favour of Parliamentary Reform was held on the 3rd of December, in the grounds of Beaufort House, Kensington, lent for the occasion by Lord Ranelagh. The procession was conducted in the most peaceful and orderly manner. The Societies assembled first in St James's Park, and from thence marched out in pre-arranged order through the gate leading into Pall Mall by Marlborough House. Amongst the trades which appeared in the largest numbers, and maintained the most imposing appearance, were the stonemasons, bricklayers, brickmakers, joiners, carpenters, cabinet-makers, tailors, and shoe-makers ; many of the trades carried emblems of their particular pursuits, and several branches of the Reform League carried banners inscribed 'Manhood Suffrage,' and 'The Ballot.' The streets were excellently kept in order by ten thousand voluntary keepers of the peace. Scarcely more than one third of the enormous procession got into the grounds of Beaufort House. Resolutions which had been drawn up were put from seven platforms to as many groups of people, and were carried unanimously. The speakers included Messrs. Beales, Potter, Dickson, Lucraft, and Holyoake.

On the following evening a great indoor meeting in connection with the Trades' Demonstration was held in St. James's Hall, Mr. G. Potter presiding. On the platform were several members of Parliament and delegates from Reform Associations in Great Britain and Ireland. A resolution in favour of Reform was carried

unanimously, and then the Ghairman called upon Mr. Bright to address the meeting.

On commencing his speech, Mr. Bright said that the counsel he had given to working men eight years before to organise themselves and press for their rights had been adopted to a large extent, and every man in the kingdom now felt that the aspect of the Reform question had been wholly changed. As to the assertion that it was undesirable for trade societies to co-operate for political objects, he pointed out that some years before nearly all the agricultural societies of the country were converted into political societies, for the purpose of sustaining an Act of Parliament which denied an honest and fair supply of food to the people of this country. The great difficulty of the opponents of Reform now was, that they felt the working men were too numerous to be let in with safety, and too numerous to be kept out without danger. If the Tories were dissatisfied with this movement, what would they have? Would they like that you should meet in secret societies, that you should administer to each other illegal oaths, that you should undertake the task of midnight drilling, that you should purchase throughout London and the provinces a supply of arms, that you should in this frightful and terrible manner endeavour to menace the Government, and to wring from them a concession of your rights? But surely one of two modes must be taken. If there be a deep and wide-spread sentiment that injustice is no longer tolerable, then, judging from all past history of all people, one of two modes will be taken, either that mode so sad and so odious of secret conspiracy, or that mode so grand and so noble which you have adopted.'

Their grievance was, Mr. Bright continued, that the representative system of England was deformed from its natural, beautiful, and just proportions. It was not at all disputed that only sixteen out of every hundred men were on the electoral rolls, and able, all other circumstances favouring, to give their vote at a general election; and it was not disputed that half the House of Commons—that an absolute majority of that House—was elected* by a number of electors not exceeding altogether three men out of every

hundred in the United Kingdom. He had taken the trouble to make a calculation from Acland's 'Imperial Poll-Book,' and he had found that the whole number of votes given at the contest in every borough and county was short of the number of 900,000, which was about one in eight of the men in the country. Taking away double votes, there would not be registered more than about 800,000 votes at a general election in the United Kingdom where there was a contest in every county and in every borough. But as a matter of fact the whole number of votes registered at the general election of 1859 was under 370,000, and from this number were to be deducted double votes, &c. After this he undertook to say that the Government of the United Kingdom, in the sense indicated in a quotation he had made from William Penn's preface to his Constitution, was not free to the English people. There was not representation enough to make Parliament truly responsible to the intelligence, and the virtue, and the opinions of the nation. But the opponents of Reform had resisted even the moderate measure of last session: they might still continue to resist, until that which was only a great exhibition of opinion might become, necessarily and inevitably, a great and menacing exhibition of force.

The next passage of Mr. Bright's speech—a powerful vindication of his own position on the Reform question—we give in full:—

'These opponents of ours, many of them in Parliament openly, and many of them secretly in the press, have charged us with being the promoters of a dangerous excitement. They say we are the source of the danger which threatens; they have absolutely the effrontery to charge me with being the friend of public disorder. I am one of the people. Surely, if there be one thing in a free country more clear than another, it is that any one of the people may speak openly to the people. If I speak to the people of their rights, and indicate to them the way to secure them—if I speak of their danger to the monopolists of power—am I not a wise counsellor, both to the people and to their rulers?

'Suppose I stood at the foot of Vesuvius or Etna, and, seeing a hamlet or a homestead planted on its slope, I said to the dwellers in that hamlet or in that homestead, You see that vapour which ascends from the summit of the mountain. That vapour may become a dense, black smoke, that will obscure the sky. You see that trickling of lava from the crevices or fissures in the side of the mountain. That trickling of lava may become a river of fire. You hear that muttering in the bowels of the mountain. That muttering may become a bellowing thunder, the voice of a violent convulsion that may shake half a continent. You know that at your feet is

the grave of great cities for which there is no resurrection, as history tells us that dynasties and aristocracies have passed away, and their name has been known no more for ever. If I say this to the dwellers upon the slope of the mountain, and if there comes hereafter a catastrophe which makes the world to shudder, am I responsible for that catastrophe? I did not build the mountain, or fill it with explosive materials. I merely warned the men that were in danger.

‘So, now, it is not I who am stimulating men to the violent pursuit of their acknowledged constitutional rights. We are merely about our lawful business; and you are the citizens of a country that calls itself free, yet you are citizens to whom is denied the greatest and the first blessing of the constitution under which you live. If the truth must be told, the Tory party is the turbulent party of this nation.’

In 1832 the country was within twenty-four hours of revolution; and in 1846 a famine was necessary before the Corn Laws were abolished. If the Franchise Bill of the past session had been carried, henceforth the people in these islands would no longer have been two nations. All would have felt that henceforth they were one people. Who prevented this? Mr. Bright went on to ask. Lord Derby, and the party of which he was the acknowledged and trusted leader. Lord Derby now stood nearest to the Throne, and he ventured to say that he was not a strength but a weakness to that Throne. One would have supposed that the Government had troubles enough on hand in Ireland without urging the people to excitement in England. Mr. Bright then drew a picture of Ireland under the Tory Government, with the Habeas Corpus Act suspended, individual liberty abolished, &c.; and added that in the presence of all this, and that which had occurred the previous year in relation to Reform, it was Lord Derby himself who was the fomentor of discord, and his party the turbulent element in English political society.

Mr Bright said he would tell that party that this question could not sleep. As a memorial forwarded to the Government of the United States by a convention held in Switzerland said, ‘Unfinished questions have no pity for the repose of nations.’ That referred to the great question of negro slavery, but it was just as true when applied to Reform. They had been told to stand still and wait for the action of Parliament, but he could not put his confidence in the men who had already betrayed them. The duty of the working men—a duty from which they could not escape—was to go on as they had begun, and to perfect in every part of the country their organisa-

tion in favour of their enfranchisement. Every one of their societies must give itself for a short time to the working out of their political redemption. Give every man engaged in the work his due, and help by every honest endeavour to bring that great national question to such a solid and final issue that it should no longer disturb the repose of the nation. 'And, lastly, I beg of you,' said the speaker, 'to rise to something like a just contemplation of what the great issue is for which you are contending. It is to make you citizens of one of the noblest nations on the face of the earth—of a nation which has a grand history in the past, and which I trust, partly through your help, will have a still grander history in the future. Let me beg of you that, in all you do, you may be animated by a great and noble spirit, for you have set your hands and hearts to a great and noble work.'

Several resolutions were proposed, and unanimously adopted by the meeting. In the course of the proceedings, Mr. Ayrton, M.P., remarked upon the Queen's infrequent appearance on public occasions, and censured her for not recognising the people when they gathered in such numbers in front of one of her palaces. Before the vote of thanks to the Chairman was put to the meeting, Mr. Bright interposed for a moment, and repudiated the insinuation contained in the speech of the member for the Tower Hamlets. 'I am not accustomed,' he said, 'to stand up in defence of those who are possessors of crowns. But I could not sit and hear that observation without a sensation of wonder and of pain. I think there has been, by many persons, a great injustice done to the Queen in reference to her desolate and widowed position. And I venture to say this, that a woman—be she the Queen of a great realm, or the wife of one of your labouring men—who can keep alive in her heart a great sorrow for the lost object of her life and affection, is not at all likely to be wanting in a great and generous sympathy with you.'

These sentiments elicited loud and prolonged cheers from the audience, and the body of the people in the hall rose, and sang a verse of 'God save the Queen.' Mr. Ayrton sought to make an explanation, to the effect that the tenor of his observations had been

misunderstood ; but he could not obtain a hearing. The meeting then closed with the vote to the Chairman.

Circumstances having now thrown Mr. Bright into great prominence as a political leader, he suffered that penalty of misrepresentation which at some period or other befalls every public man. Amongst his detractors was Mr. Garth, M.P., who, in an address to the electors of Guildford, charged Mr. Bright with never having dared to stand for his own town, with refusing to subscribe to the Cotton Famine Relief Fund, and with wishing to support the suffering workmen by loans, that he might have them as serfs at his beck and call. The complete groundlessness of these charges having been proved in a correspondence which took place, Mr. Garth endeavoured to explain them away. Upon this Mr. Bright wrote : ' On a review of your speech and your letter, I came to this conclusion—that you wished to get into Parliament, and were not particular as to the path which might lead to it. You threw dirt during your canvass, doubtless knowing that if needful you could eat it afterwards. There are many men who go through dirt to dignities, and I suspect you have no objection to be one of them.' Amongst others who misrepresented Mr. Bright at this time was Mr. H. D. Seymour, who, in an article in the *Fortnightly Review*, founded certain political charges upon incorrect reports of Mr. Bright's speeches. Unlike some clerical and other libellers, however, Mr. Seymour at once made reparation for that which had really been done through inadvertence.

The best answer to Mr. Bright's detractors was furnished on the 25th of January, 1867, when twelve hundred of the workpeople of Messrs. John Bright & Brothers voluntarily assembled in the Public Hall at Rochdale, and presented an address to the hon. member for Birmingham, expressive of their entire sympathy with, and sincere respect for, him under the malignant slanders which had been urged against him as their employer. The address—which was moved, seconded, and supported by working men in Mr. Bright's employ—after speaking of the attacks on his private character as base and unfounded, said he had always endeavoured to improve their moral, social, and intellectual well-being, while as a public character his

best endeavours had been made to raise the great wealth-producing class to the full right of citizenship. The address further prayed that his life, as an employer and as a statesman, might long be spared. Mr. Bright, who was much moved by this spontaneous expression of feeling, suitably replied to the address, observing, amid loud cheers, that every honourable man in Rochdale knew there was not a shadow or a shade of foundation for the charges which had been made against him. His only crime was that he had resisted the monopolists of political power—that since the first hour he stepped upon a public platform and took part in political questions he had pleaded for the rights of the millions of the people in the country. Referring to what had been said of him with regard to the Factory Act, Mr. Bright observed that the establishment of Free Trade about the time when the Factory Act passed caused so great an increase of trade and demand for labour, that the Factory Act itself had been made to work with a success that in all probability it would not have met with if the changes to which he had referred had not been made. He thought it possible—and hoped it was certain—that at some period even the present hours of labour might be to a further extent shortened. Mr. T. B. Potter and Mr. Goldwin Smith followed Mr. Bright with speeches expressive of sympathy.

The townspeople of Rochdale also took up the matter, and a few days later, on the 30th of January, a public meeting was held, presided over by Mr. H. Kelsall, J.P. An address, similar in purport to that drawn up by his workmen, was presented to Mr. Bright, and the hon. gentleman in his reply glanced at his twenty-five years of political life, and said that the great cardinal principle upon which he had acted was, that the law and the administration of the law in this country should regard with just and equal eye all classes of people. He had learnt from his earliest youth to feel a sympathy which he could never express in words for those men who occupied a humble social rank, and who had few of those compensations which gave to men who were better off the main charms of life.

Great interest continued to be manifested in the Reform question, in anticipation of the Ministerial plans expected in the ensuing

session. On the 11th of February, a demonstration was organised by the Reform League in Trafalgar Square, and the whole of the square and its approaches were densely crowded. The procession—whose numbers were variously estimated at from 20,000 to 100,000—marched from the Square to the Agricultural Hall, Islington. The Prince of Wales and the Duke of Edinburgh viewed the procession from one of the upper windows of the United Service Club. At the Athenæum, opposite, the Archbishop of York, several other prelates, and Mr. Charles Dickens, were upon the balconies. In St. James's Street many members of the aristocracy and of both Houses of Parliament were to be seen at the windows of various houses. The procession, which passed through the streets in the most orderly manner, arrived at the Agricultural Hall shortly before six o'clock. The Hall was speedily filled in all parts, and thousands of persons were unable to obtain admission. The speakers at the meeting included Mr. Beales, Professor Rogers, The O'Donoghue, Mr. T. B. Potter, M.P., Mr. P. A. Taylor, M.P., Mr. Ernest Jones, Professor Beesly, Mr. Bradlaugh, and the Rev. A. O'Neil. The Government propositions were read out at the meeting, and severely condemned; and the Ministry was declared to be unworthy of the confidence of the country.

It was on the same day, in the House of Commons, that the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Disraeli) introduced the Government scheme of Reform, announcing that it was his intention to proceed by means of resolutions. The two principles which had been observed in framing them were, that no borough was to be wholly disfranchised except for bribery, and that in re-arranging the districts representatives would be given to all places reasonably entitled to the privilege. On the 25th Mr. Disraeli submitted the details of his scheme. The occupation franchise in boroughs was to be reduced to £6 rating; in counties to £20; the franchise was also to be extended to any person having £50 in the funds, £30 in savings bank for a year, payment of 20s. of direct taxes, a University degree, the profession of a clergyman or any minister of religion, any learned profession, or a certificated schoolmaster. Yarmouth, Lancaster, Reigate, and Totness were to be disfranchised, and

twenty-three boroughs with less than seven thousand inhabitants were to have one member each. Of the thirty seats thus placed at the disposal of the House, he proposed to allot fourteen to new boroughs in the northern and midland districts, fifteen to counties, and one to the London University. The total expected addition to borough constituencies would be 212,000, and to county constituencies 206,500. From a phrase used by a member of the Cabinet subsequently, this measure came to be spoken of as 'The Ten Minutes' Bill.'

Mr. Lowe objected to proceeding by resolution, and called for a plain, simple bill at once.

Mr. Bright said he agreed with Mr. Lowe, that to discuss the resolutions would be a waste of time. The Ministry had probably not made up their minds on the resolutions till within the last two days. Mr. Bright commented on the new franchises now proposed, and said that the computations as to the number of votes to be created were like the computations in 1859—nothing but loose guessing. 'It is estimated that there may be an increase in the boroughs of 130,000, and of 82,000 voters on the ratepaying qualification. And then it is proposed to make these childish new franchises from the savings banks and direct taxation. By a bill now before the House, a ratcatcher who keeps four dogs will pay twenty shillings of direct taxes, and will come, of course, into one of the new constituencies which are to save the country from destruction. Will these proposals settle, or do anything to settle, the question of Reform? It is assumed that the House is unanimous for something, and will have a Reform Bill; but there is an essential difference, and a perilous one, between a Reform Bill and a Reform.'

Mr. Bright then criticised the details of the scheme, and observed, in conclusion, 'If the Government are willing to produce a substantial and satisfactory bill, I—although I am not of their party, and they have opposed all the propositions in which I am concerned—should not factiously oppose them. But having changed sides, having become Reformers, having decided at half-past two o'clock to-day to allow the right hon. gentleman to appear

in a new character as a Reformer in this House, I ask you, for your own sake and for his sake, and, what is worth infinitely more than your reputation or his position, for the interest of this great nation, and for the satisfaction of an excited and anxious people, that this measure, if it is to be passed this session, shall be one at least that should release me and other members who are in favour of Reform from further discussion and agitation of the question during our Parliamentary life.

At a meeting of the Liberal members of the House of Commons, held at Mr. Gladstone's house, 289 being present, it was unanimously agreed to support an amendment setting aside the resolutions. On the evening of the same day, however, February 26th, Mr. Disraeli announced that the Government would abandon their resolutions, and produce a Reform Bill on an early date. Mr. Bright recommended the Government to bring in a Franchise Bill first; for in that branch of the question lay the greatest grievance—the exclusion of the working classes.

The resolve of a majority of the Cabinet to introduce a 'real and satisfactory' measure led to the resignation of three of the Ministers—General Peel, the Earl of Carnarvon, and Lord Cranborne. Ministerial explanations ensued in both Houses. In the Lower House, Lord Cranborne said that it was virtually household suffrage which the Cabinet had decided upon, and Mr. Lowe asked whether it was to bring in household suffrage that he and others combined to turn out the late Government. Mr. Bright advised members not to take counsel from Mr. Lowe, for he opposed the extension of the franchise. For himself, he (Mr. Bright) had always said that household suffrage was the true suffrage for boroughs. He appealed to the Government to deal with the working class as they would deal with other sections of the community, in a liberal and generous manner, and not to attempt by any tricks to shut them out from that which they had a right to expect. If they could not go so far as he was inclined, he asked them to try something else, but he asked them to let their propositions be simple and intelligible. The working classes, who read every syllable that was uttered in that House on the subject, were

not to be deceived; and their feeling in this matter was to be gathered from the motto on a banner carried by the carpenters at a late trades' demonstration, expressed, not in choice English, but in language that would be well understood, 'Deal with us on the square; we have been chiselled long enough.'

On the 18th of March, Mr. Disraeli brought forward his new bill in the House of Commons. The proposals he then made were briefly as follows: That in boroughs the electors should be all who paid rates, or twenty shillings in direct taxes; the franchise should also be extended to certain classes qualified by education, or by the possession of a stated amount of property in the Funds, or in savings banks; rated householders to have a second vote. As in the former bill, seats were to be taken from the smaller boroughs and those recently reported against for bribery, and given to more populous places—fourteen to boroughs, fifteen to counties, and one to London University. As a security against the power of mere numbers, the Chancellor of the Exchequer described minutely a system of checks, based on residence, rating, and dual voting.

When the second reading came to be moved, Mr. Gladstone severely criticised the bill, and enumerated its chief defects as follows: 1. The absence of a lodger franchise; 2. The absence of means to prevent the traffic in votes that would infallibly arise in a large scheme affecting the lowest class of householders; 3. The vexatious distinctions between compound householders and direct ratepayers which the bill retained and aggravated; 4. The tax-paying franchise; 5. The dual vote; 6. The inadequacy of the redistribution scheme; 7. The high figure of the county franchise; 8. The use of voting papers; 9. The fancy or special franchises.

During the debate, Mr. Bright spoke with great force and sarcasm. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, he said, had been trading for several weeks on this measure, whose real object was to introduce to the suffrage about as many men as would be admitted by an £8 tenure. If this were so, why talk of household franchise? The Government were renewing the error of 1832—they were continuing the exclusion of the working classes from the franchise. If this were the limit of the concession, the course

they were pursuing was a perilous course; for, as a set-off to this concession, the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposed to give a vote to 200,000 of a higher class.

Mr. Bright passed in review the various parts of the bill, and added—

‘The bill as a whole I regard as very unsatisfactory. It has marks upon it of being the product, not of the friends, but of the enemies of Reform. It is wonderful what clever men will do when a dozen of them are shut up in a room. Now look at the Chancellor of the Exchequer: he is a marvel of cleverness, or else he would not have been for twenty years at the head of hon. gentlemen opposite, to lead them into this—what shall I call it?—great difficulty at last. (Laughter.) Take the right hon. member who sits next to him, representing a very learned university, Cambridge (Mr. Walpole). Take the President of the Poor Law Board (Mr. Gathorne Hardy), who represents the wisdom, and it may be, to some extent, the prejudices of Oxford. Take the right hon. member for Droitwich (Sir John Pakington). I fear to speak of so potent a personage. (Laughter.) At this very moment he directs the whole of the armies of the empire. There is not a soldier who shivers amid the snows of Canada, or who sweats under the sun of India, but shivers and sweats under the influence of the right hon. gentleman. (Renewed laughter.) It was only the other day he was Lord High Admiral of England. His “march was on the mountain wave,” his “home was on the deep.” (Laughter.) But all these gentlemen retire into a mysterious apartment in Downing Street, and they set to work and concoct a Reform Bill; and with all their capacity, it seems to me to come out a bill marvellously like that which would have been made by the hon. member for North Lincolnshire (Mr. Banks Stanhope), who last night gave us an account of his conversion. Anything more affecting could hardly be heard in any class-meeting. But he spoke of “we” all this time—what “we” did, what determinations “we” had come to. In thinking it over to-day, I have come to the conclusion that he is the author of this bill. (Laughter.) . . . It would leave the greatest question of our time absolutely unsolved. Sir, it seems to me impossible to assist a Government which will not tell us frankly what it intends, what it stands by, what it will get rid of—which asks us to go into its confidence, and yet is probably the most reticent Government that ever sat on those benches. If any gentlemen on this side were to treat you as you treated us last year, I should denounce them with the strongest language I could use. I hate the ways, I scorn the purposes of faction; and if I am driven now, or at any stage of this bill, to oppose the Government, it is because the measure they have offered to us bears upon its face marks of deception and disappointment, and because I will be no party to any bill which would cheat the great body of my countrymen of the possession of that power in this House on which they have set their hearts, and which, as I believe, by the constitution of this country they may most justly claim.’ (Loud cheers.)

The bill was eventually read a second time without a division, it being perceived from Mr. Disraeli’s speech at the close of the

debate that the Government were open to pressure with regard to many of its provisions. In committee, a great many substantial amendments were carried by the Opposition, but a knot of Liberal members, designated the 'Tea-room party,' broke away from Mr. Gladstone on the policy of binding the committee by instructions. When the division on the rate-paying clauses came to be taken, on the 11th of April, there was a Government majority of 21. On the 18th Mr. Gladstone intimated his withdrawal from the leadership of the Liberal party on the Reform question, in a letter to Mr. Crawford. But while he would not take the initiative in future as touching amendments to the bill, he promised all possible aid to others in the effort to make the bill a good one.

During the Easter recess many large and important meetings were held in London and the provincial towns in connection with the Reform question. The greatest of these gatherings, probably, was that held at Birmingham on the 22nd of April, when some fifty thousand persons were computed to be present.

Mr. Bright spoke at the demonstration, and said that from the preamble of the Government bill to the last word in it there was not a single proposition any real, earnest, intelligent reformer would assent to. The bill had gone into committee, and the very first vote in the committee had confirmed the worst feature in the bill. The Liberal party had, by the treachery of some of its members, abdicated its functions, and handed the future fortunes of the bill over to those who were not the friends of Reform. Amid the cheers of his audience, Mr. Bright thus spoke of Mr. Gladstone: 'I will venture to say this, that since 1832 there has been no man of the official rank or class, and no statesman, who has imported into this question of Reform so much of conviction, so much of earnestness, so much of zeal, as has been imparted during the last two years by the leader of the Liberal party. Who is there in the House of Commons who equals him in knowledge of all political questions? who equals him in earnestness? who equals him in eloquence? who equals him in courage and fidelity to his convictions? If these gentlemen who say they will not follow him have any one who is equal, let them show him. If they can point out any statesman who

can add dignity and grandeur to the stature of Mr. Gladstone, let them produce him.' Mr. Bright added that it was a deplorable thing that a band of very small men could, at that critical hour, throw themselves athwart the objects of a great party, and mar, it might be, a great measure that ought to affect the interests of the country beneficially for all time.

The House of Commons resumed its discussions on the Reform Bill on the 2nd of May. Meanwhile the Reform League prepared to hold a great demonstration in Hyde Park. This was forbidden by a proclamation issued from the Home Office; and on the 3rd instant, Mr. Walpole obtained leave to bring in a bill on the subject, providing that any one convening or assisting at such a meeting in any of the Royal parks should, on conviction, be liable to a penalty not exceeding £10, or two months' imprisonment. The Government were subsequently advised, however, that the proposed meeting in Hyde Park was perfectly legal, and Lord Derby announced that they had no intention of putting it down by force. The demonstration was accordingly held on the 6th, and the people assembled in large numbers. Speeches were made at ten different platforms, and resolutions carried in accordance with the views of the League upon the Reform question. The whole of the proceedings were conducted in the most orderly and exemplary manner. These events led to the retirement of Mr. Walpole from the Home Office.

Mr. Bright laboured assiduously to secure such changes in the Government bill as should make it acceptable. Speaking at a meeting in St. James's Hall on the 15th of May, he said that he considered the basis of the borough franchise bad; and that a requirement that all men should pay a certain rate—the poor rate—would inevitably, in the lowest class of voters, afford at least great opportunity for corruption. If the bill passed as it then stood, it would only offer to 245,000 men, in all the boroughs of England and Wales, the elective franchise, on condition that every one of them had resided twelve months in the borough, paid his rate, and taken whatever steps might be necessary to see that his name was left neither off the rate-book nor off the register.

It does not come within our province to follow in detail the

course of the intricate and protracted discussions which arose in the House of Commons on the various provisions of the measure. Such vexed questions as that of the compound householder became enveloped in a cloud of hazy rhetoric, until few could grasp the nature and extent of the amendments proposed. Mr. Bright rose on many occasions—interposing with observations, not set speeches,—always, of course, with the one definite object in view of extending the suffrage and ridding it of those restrictions by which it was entangled in the Government bill. But there was one question discussed, that of voting papers, upon which he expressed himself at length, and we shall therefore pause for a short time over this speech.

By the Government bill it was proposed to permit the vote to be given by voting papers, and not to require personal attendance at the poll. The Opposition objected to this proposal on the ground that it would afford opportunity for fraud, and for practices inconsistent with freedom of election. In the end the proposition of the Government was rejected. Mr. Bright said that the arguments used during the debate should end, after this wide extension of the suffrage, in establishing vote by ballot. As to the question immediately before the House, it was contrary to the interests of the country, and opposed to the purity and reality of the electoral system, that they should give inducements to obtain votes in counties where people did not reside, for the purpose of interfering with the real and honest representation of the residents of a county. The committee which sat on the subject rejected the proposition in regard to the country at large, and decided on special grounds that the plan might only be safely adopted in respect to the Universities. His own belief was that the system was bad. It had not the good effect of open voting. ‘It escapes from that which you have always claimed as the great advantage of open voting—that is, the general publicity and influence of public opinion, and what you call the salutary effect of a man performing a great public duty in the face of his fellowmen.’

It was claimed that the system was permissive; but whilst it altogether sheltered a man from public opinion, it did not in the least

give him the advantages of secret voting. Lord Cranborne had spoken of sick people and nervous people, and others who could not go to the poll, but he (Mr. Bright) did not believe that there was any appreciable number of voters who could not go to the poll for the reasons assigned. It was mainly for the rich that this system was devised. 'And what happens when the voting papers have been signed and sent in? You establish one of the most hateful and most unheard-of things that can be imagined, which is the giving of votes by proxy. I understand that lately there has been a discussion in another place on the subject of voting by proxy, and there is a general impression that this system—which no man defends upon any principle—will not last long. Therefore, I hope the House of Commons will not now attempt to establish in any shape anything so unprincipled and hateful with regard to our Parliamentary elections as this would prove to be. Because, when any person has received a number of voting-papers from any borough or part of a county, it is quite clear that he can either poll them or not, as he thinks fit. He can hold them back, or make a traffic of them. They are not exactly bank-notes; but as he holds them in his hand, he may traffic with them as if they were bank-notes. Now, I think it

"Better to bear the ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of."

The whole question was this—whether the system of polling should be changed to what is right, or whether it should be a general system of voting through the Post Office. Let them have either open voting or the ballot. If the present proposition were adopted, it would create amazement and consternation throughout the country.

The Reform Bill passed the House of Commons on the 15th of July, and on the following day it was read a first time in the House of Lords. The second reading was taken a few days later without a division; but when the measure was discussed in committee, many important changes were introduced, which had the effect of rendering the bill more conservative and reactionary. In closing the debate on the third reading, Lord Derby said they were taking a leap in the dark, but he entertained a strong hope that the

extended franchise would be the means of placing the institutions of the country on a firmer basis.

The Lords' amendments excited considerable indignation in the country, and meetings were held denouncing them. At a demonstration held at Manchester, Mr. Bright strongly animadverted upon the alterations. He could not, he said, but regard them as the offspring and spawn of feeble minds. He condemned and repudiated the whole scheme from beginning to end, and said that any one who adopted the principle of the representation of minorities must shake the faith and lose the confidence of every true friend of reform and of freedom.

On the 8th of August the amendments came on for consideration in the House of Commons. One of the most important—that passed at the instigation of Lord Cairns, for the representation of minorities—was warmly opposed by Mr. Bright, who delivered a lengthy and forcible speech on the whole subject.

He said that he considered it to be a restriction of electoral power, and pointed out to those who, like Mr. Mill, supported it more as a mode of representing everybody than, like Lord Cranborne, as a corrective of the democratic tendencies of the bill, that it would create such ill-feeling in the country, as for a long time to prevent the consideration of any comprehensive scheme such as Mr. Hare's. To Mr. Disraeli's single plea for accepting it, he replied that the Commons had originally rejected the idea by a large majority, and insisted that on a point affecting their own constitution the vote of the House of Commons was of more authority than that of the Lords. The scheme had never been asked for by any constituency; it had never been discussed in the country; and the least the House could do was to suspend its decision until the idea had become more familiar. 'There are jugglers whom we have seen exhibiting their clever tricks—pouring out port, champagne, milk, and water from one and the same bottle. The proposal resembles this. The scheme is, that an electoral body, by a peculiar contrivance hitherto unknown, and I will undertake to say, if ever heard of, only despised, shall not be asked, but shall be made to do this—to return two members to sit on this side, and one on the other, or *vice versa*.'

Mr. Bright further argued that the clause would extinguish the political life of the country ; it would nullify the boon conferred on the four great towns, each of which would for the future, in all divisions on great political questions, be represented by one member. He avowed that, had he suspected the House would sanction this scheme, he would have voted against giving these towns a third member ; and after showing that it would be inapplicable to bye-elections, caused either by the death or the appointment to office of some member representing a minority, he concluded by a powerful denunciation of the scheme as utterly inconsistent with constitutional principles. 'Let us get rid of all feeling,' he said, 'except that this change has been recommended to us by the House of Lords, in which there cannot be either the same knowledge or the same interest in the matter which exists in this House. Let us look at this simply as it refers to the great body in whose names we sit and speak here. Let us look at it in reference to that grand old freedom which our forefathers struggled for, and secured, and maintained, and the advantages of which, from the day of our birth till this hour, we have been constantly enjoying. If this proposal had come before this House at the time when the great men, the giants of the English constitution, sat in this House, they would have treated it in a manner far less decorous than we shall treat it. There is no name that appears among the great men of that day, parents of English freedom, which would not have been found among the names of those who shall this day say "No!" to the mischievous proposition sent down to us by the House of Lords.'

The Commons, however, adopted the Lords' amendment by 253 votes to 204. The Reform Bill received the royal assent on the 15th of August.

With all its defects, judging from the point of view of Mr. Bright and his supporters, the measure, on the whole, was a great concession to the principles advocated by the member for Birmingham. As Lord Cranborne said, the Government bill had been modified according to the demands made by Mr. Gladstone, on the principles laid down by Mr. Bright. From a strongly Conservative measure it was transformed into an extremely Liberal one. Men of all

parties, however they might differ as to the details of the bill, recognised in it a settlement for a long period of a question which had given rise to an agitation now extending over a series of years, and which threatened still further to disturb the peace of the country, until the representation of the people was placed upon a more satisfactory and durable basis.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IRISH QUESTIONS—1866-68.

Mr. Bright's Advocacy of Irish Questions.—Disturbed Condition of Ireland in 1866.—The Coercion Bill.—Mr. Bright on the Irish People.—He appeals to Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli to settle the Irish Question.—Renewal of the Coercion Act.—Mr. Bright on Mr. Roebuck.—Visit of the former to Ireland.—Letter from Mr. John B. Dillon and The O'Donoghue.—Mr. Bright's Speech at Dublin.—Arguments for Disestablishment and Land Reform.—Eloquent Peroration.—The Ballot and the Electoral System.—Scheme for the Sale of Land in Ireland.—Mr. Bright at Birmingham.—Irish Reforms.—Irish Debate in the House of Commons.—Mr. Maguire's Motion.—Speech of Mr. Bright.—He examines the Government Policy.—His own Plan for a Farmer Proprietary.—Religious Equality in Ireland a Necessity.—Outline of a Scheme for Disestablishment.—Important Declaration by Mr. Gladstone.—Mr. Maguire withdraws his Motion.—Mr. Gladstone introduces his Irish Church Resolutions.—Prolonged Debate.—Powerful Speech by Mr. Bright in Support of the Resolutions.—Mr. Gladstone's Motion carried by a large majority.—Ministers advise a Disolution.—Their Conduct is severely condemned.—Meeting in St. James's Hall against Disestablishment.—The Irish Church Resolutions carried in the House of Commons.—Mr. Bright sternly rebukes Mr. Disraeli.—The Irish Church Suspensory Bill introduced.—It passes the Commons, but is rejected by the Lords.—Mr. Bright advocates Disestablishment at Liverpool.—Justice to Ireland.—He visits Ireland in 1868.—Speech at Limerick.—The General Election.—Great Liberal Majority.—Mr. Gladstone becomes Premier.

IN the memorable period of legislation extending from 1866 to the second year of Mr. Gladstone's first Administration, Mr. Bright was not only unrelenting in the cause of Reform, but indefatigable in pleading the claims of Ireland. His eloquent advocacy had much to do with accelerating two of the greatest measures which were passed in the interest of Ireland before the Land Act of 1881, namely, the Act for the disestab-

lishment and disendowment of the Irish Church, and the Act of 1870 for the amendment of the system of land tenure in Ireland. It will be convenient to give a separate treatment in this place to Mr. Bright's addresses upon Irish questions during the years above mentioned.

At the commencement of the year 1866, Ireland, from her unhappily disturbed condition, occupied a prominent position in the public eye. The Fenian conspiracy, which in the preceding year had occasioned much disquietude, still occupied the full attention of the Irish Executive. Frequent arrests and seizures of arms were made, and great alarm was felt in certain districts by the loyal portion of the community. The Government, unable to suppress disaffection by ordinary means, were driven on the assembling of Parliament to propose the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act in Ireland. As the measure was very urgent, the two Houses met on Saturday, the 17th of February, for the purpose of carrying the necessary bill through its various stages, in order that it might come into operation on the following Monday, the 19th.

Sir George Grey introduced the measure in the House of Commons, citing facts which had come to the knowledge of the Executive in its justification. He read extracts from articles in the Irish papers, and from documents seized by the police, showing that the object of the conspirators was to wrest Ireland from the British Crown, and that men, arms, and money were to be supplied from America for that purpose. Irish-American emissaries were dispersed throughout the country, swearing in members, endeavouring to seduce the troops from their allegiance, and holding out false hopes of material assistance from the United States Government. The Lord Lieutenant (Lord Wodehouse) had reported that the disaffection of the population in certain counties, such as Cork, Tipperary, Waterford, and Dublin, was alarming, and every day it was spreading more and more throughout the country.

Mr. Bright, following Mr. Disraeli, expressed the shame and humiliation which he felt at being called on for a second time in a Parliamentary career of twenty-two years to suspend the Habeas

Corpus Act in Ireland. Yet he did not believe that the Secretary of State had overstated his case for the purpose of inducing the House to consent to his proposition. He believed that if the majority of the people of Ireland, counted fairly out, had their will, and if they had the power, they would unmoor the island from its fastenings in the deep, and move it at least two thousand miles to the west. And he believed, further, that if by conspiracy, or insurrection, or by that open agitation to which alone he ever would give any favour or consent, they could shake off the authority, he would not say of the English Crown, but of the Imperial Parliament, they would gladly do so.

Few statesmen have spoken so generously of the Irish people as Mr. Bright, and he now went on to say: 'An hon. member from Ireland a few nights ago referred to the character of the Irish people. He said, and I believe it is true, that there is no other Christian nation with which we are acquainted amongst whom crime of the ordinary character, as we reckon it in this country, is so rare as it is amongst his countrymen. He might have said, also, that there is no people—whatever they may be at home—more industrious than his countrymen in every other country but their own. He might have said more; that they are a people of a cheerful and joyous temperament. He might have said more than this; that they are singularly grateful for kindnesses shown to them, and that of all the people of our race they are filled with the strongest sentiment of veneration. And yet, with such materials and with such a people, after centuries of government—after sixty-five years of government by this House—you have them embittered against your rule, and anxious only to throw off the authority of the Crown and Queen of these realms.' There was chronic insurrection in Ireland, and the causes of this he traced to the unjust legislation of the Imperial Parliament, which, since the Union, had passed many Coercion Bills, but only three really good measures for Ireland—the Catholic Emancipation Act, under the danger of civil war; the Poor Relief Act; and the Encumbered Estates Act, under the pressure of a terrible famine.

That there had been improved administration Mr. Bright

admitted, but he denied that there had been any statesmanship shown in dealing with the Irish question, and he doubted whether any of the Ministers in his time had comprehended it. This he attributed in a large measure to the system of parties; and in the following eloquent passage he called upon Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli to suspend their contests for office, and to combine in an effort to ascertain the causes of Irish discontent and to apply a remedy:—

‘I put the question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He is the only man of this Government whom I have heard of late years who has spoken as if he comprehended this question, and he made a speech in the last session of Parliament which was not without its influence both in England and in Ireland. I should like to ask him whether this Irish question is above the stature of himself and of his colleagues. If it be, I ask them to come down from the high places which they occupy, and try to learn the art of legislation and government before they practise it. I myself believe, if we could divest ourselves of the feelings engendered by party strife, we might come to some better result. Take the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Is there in any legislative assembly in the world a man, as the world judges, of more transcendent capacity? I will say even, is there a man with a more honest wish to do good to the country in which he occupies so conspicuous a place? (Cheers.)

‘Take the right hon. gentleman opposite, the leader of the Opposition—is there in any legislative assembly in the world, at this moment, a man leading an Opposition of more genius for his position, who has given proof in every way but one in which proof can be given that he is competent to the highest duties of the highest offices of the State? Well, but these men—great men whom we on this side and you on that side, to a large extent, admire and follow—fight for office, and the result is they sit alternately, one on this side and one on that. But suppose it were possible for these men, with their intellects, with their far-reaching vision, to examine this question thoroughly, and to say for once, whether this leads to office and to the miserable notoriety that men call fame which springs from office, or not, “If it be possible, we will act with loyalty to the Sovereign and justice to the people; and if it be possible, we will make Ireland a strength and not a weakness to the British Empire.” It is from this fighting with party, and for party, and for the gains which party gives, that there is so little result from the great intellect of such men as these. (Cheers.) Like the captive Samson of old—

“They grind in brazen fetters, under task,
With their Heaven-gifted strength;”

and the country and the world gain little by those faculties which God has given them for the blessing of the country and the world.’

Mr. Bright asked how it was that these eminent statesmen and their colleagues had not succeeded in making the Irish as loyal to

the Crown as the English. He and those who thought with him had been charged by members in that House, and by writers in the press, with dislike to the institutions and even disloyalty to the dynasty which ruled in England. 'There can be nothing more offensive, nothing more unjust, nothing more utterly false. We who ask Parliament, in dealing with Ireland, to deal with it upon the unchangeable principles of justice, are the friends of the people, and the really loyal advisers and supporters of the throne.' The hon. gentleman next pointed out that the fact of Fenianism having to some extent a foreign origin aggravated the present difficulty, and he asked why Englishmen and Scotchmen, when they emigrated, did not, like Irishmen, carry with them an inveterate hatred to the Government and institutions of the land of their birth. He declared that it was not in human nature to live content under such institutions as existed in Ireland, and when this insurrection was suppressed there would still remain the seeds of another crop of disaffection. He believed there was a mode of making Ireland loyal, and he threw the responsibility of discovering it on the Government and on the Imperial Parliament. He did not oppose the bill, but he hoped the Government would not allow the debate to close without giving the nation some hope that before long measures would be introduced which would make Ireland as loyal and contented as Great Britain. 'If every man outside the walls of this House who has the interest of the whole empire at heart were to speak here, what would he say to this House? Let not one day elapse, let not another session pass, until you have done something to wipe off this blot—for blot it is upon the reign of the Queen, and scandal it is to the civilisation and to the justice of the people of this country.'

Mr. Gladstone, in his reply, said the Government would be ready at a fitting time to consider any measures which might be proposed for the benefit of Ireland, but the paramount duty of the House that day was to strengthen the hands of the Executive in the preservation of law and order.

Leave was given to introduce the bill by 364 to 6 votes, and it passed through all its stages without further discussion. It was also carried through the Lords with a like rapidity; and as soon as it had

passed, a telegram was sent to Earl Granville, at Osborne, apprising him of the result. The Queen then affixed her signature to the document authorising the Commissioners to give her assent to the bill. At a quarter past twelve the same night, the Royal Commissioners appeared in the House of Lords, and made known the commands of Her Majesty. The measure thus became law under circumstances of unexampled celerity.

The Act was renewed in the following session, when Mr. Bright again spoke on behalf of remedial legislation, and defended the Irish members for not resting content under merely coercive legislation. He also happily retorted upon Mr. Roebuck, amid the cheers and laughter of the House. Mr. Roebuck's passion for contradiction, as those will remember who are acquainted with his public speeches, was something abnormal. On this occasion, he had not only contradicted Mr. Maguire, but had made him say something which he had never uttered. It was to this Mr. Bright referred when he observed, 'I said the other day that the hon. and learned gentleman (Mr. Roebuck) was always ready to contradict everybody. He gets up now, and not only contradicts my hon. friend, but makes him make a speech he never made—and then he contradicts that. (Laughter.) He reminds me of a case I saw the other day in the newspapers, in which a man objected to serve on a jury. The Judge said he was wrong in making the objection, because every man should be willing to serve as a juror, and therefore he could not excuse him. The man then said, "I am not fit to be a juryman, for never in my whole life was I able to agree with any one." (Laughter.) But the Judge encouraged him to act, and told him he should serve as a juryman. He then said that was not his only infirmity, for he had discovered that he was not able to agree with himself. That is the case with the hon. and learned gentleman.' (Renewed laughter.)

In October 1866 Mr. Bright visited Dublin, and was entertained at a banquet given to him in the Rotunda in that city. The invitation was forwarded to him on behalf of an important section of Irish members of Parliament and of other influential persons.

We insert the letter which accompanied the invitation, with Mr.

Bright's reply. The first signature to the letter is that of Mr. John Blake Dillon, the father of Mr. John Dillon, the present member for Tipperary. Mr. Dillon was not at the banquet; to the great sorrow of his many friends he died before the event occurred in which he had taken so deep an interest.

'7 LOWER ORMOND QUAY, DUBLIN,
August 21st, 1866.

'DEAR MR. BRIGHT,—An invitation to a public banquet in Dublin goes to you by this day's mail.

'The signatures represent a large mass of public opinion in this country, the great majority of those who join in the invitation being persons who fill some representative office. Collectively they are entitled to tender to you, as they do in the present invitation, the respect and confidence of the Irish people.

'We trust you will on this occasion overcome your declared reluctance to be present at such demonstrations. The banquet, if you accept it, is certain to be a great success. It would have the best effect in dispelling some mischievous illusions of which a portion of our people are the victims, and in cementing that union of British and Irish Liberals which we believe to be vitally important to both under present circumstances.

'Assuming that you will accept, we leave the day entirely to your own selection, merely suggesting that an early day in October would probably be acceptable to the majority of those who will attend the banquet.—We remain very faithfully yours,

'JOHN B. DILLON.

'O'DONOGHUE.'

'ROCHDALE, *Sept. 1, 1866.*

'DEAR MR. DILLON,—I am afraid you will think me long in answering your letter of the 21st ult., and in replying to the invitation to the proposed banquet, which duly reached me. The invitation is a very remarkable one, and I cannot doubt that it represents an important amount of public opinion in Ireland. To myself it is a testimony of approval and kind feeling which I estimate most

highly, although it involves me in no little difficulty, for I have been hoping for a quiet autumn, with an absence of public meetings and of public labour.

‘I am not confident that my coming to Ireland will be of any service, but as so many amongst you are of opinion that something may be done to make a more perfect union between the Liberals of Ireland and the Liberal party here, with a view to wiser legislation for your country and ours, I have not felt at liberty to refuse the invitation which has been sent to me.

‘I accept it with much gratitude to those from whom it comes, and with a hope that in doing so I am not stepping beyond the bounds of what seems to be my duty.

‘Some time during the month of October will, I hope, be convenient to all concerned, but I must ask you to leave the precise day to be fixed two or three weeks hence. About the middle of the month will probably be the best time for me, if there be no objection to it on the part of my friends in Dublin.

‘With many thanks to you and to those on whose behalf you have written to me,—I am very sincerely yours,

‘JOHN BRIGHT.

‘John B. Dillon, Esq., M.P.’

The gathering, which took place on the 30th of October, was a very imposing one. The invitation was signed by upwards of twenty members of Parliament, and by a large number of influential members of the Liberal party in Ireland. The O’Donoghue, M.P., occupied the chair, and in opening the proceedings said that, in the name of Ireland, they gave to John Bright, the matchless advocate of popular rights, and their tried and trusted friend, a thousand welcomes to the shores of Ireland.

Mr. Bright began his speech by saying how grateful it was to his heart that such a number of his countrymen had approved generally of the political course he had pursued. His position was a difficult if honourable one, for he had written to his friend Sir John Gray to put an extinguisher upon this project of a public reception. But the matter had gone too far for him to refuse the

invitation. He then paid a high tribute to one who had signed the invitation, but had since passed away—affirming that amongst all her worthy sons, Ireland had no worthier and no nobler son than John Blake Dillon. Coming to the Irish problem, Mr. Bright said he would endeavour to answer the question—‘How is it that we, the Imperial Parliament, cannot act so as to bring about in Ireland contentment and tranquillity, and a solid union between Ireland and Great Britain? And that means, further, How can we improve the condition and change the minds of the people of Ireland?’ Whatever defect there was in the Irish race, came not from their character, but from their history, and from the conditions to which they had been subjected. He cited facts to prove this; and alluding to the charge that the great misfortune of Ireland was in the existence of political agitators, he said: ‘As to that, I may state that the most distinguished political agitators that have appeared during the last hundred years in Ireland are Grattan and O’Connell, and I should say that he must be either a very stupid or a very base Irishman who would wish to erase the achievements of Grattan and O’Connell from the annals of his country.’

Some said that the priests were the cause of much of the discontent of Ireland; but he believed there was no class of men who had a deeper interest in a prosperous and numerous community than they had; and he believed that no men had suffered more from witnessing the miseries of the Irish people. Mr. Bright, having referred to the hardship of the Established Church in Ireland, and the Land Laws, said that Ireland had been a land of evictions—a word scarcely known in any other civilised country. It was a country, too, in which a most desolating famine had prevailed.

‘It is a country where there has been, for generations past, a general sense of wrong, out of which has grown a state of chronic insurrection; and at this very moment when I speak, the general safeguard of constitutional liberty is withdrawn, and we meet in this hall, and I speak here to-night, rather by the forbearance and permission of the Irish Executive, than under the protection of the common safeguards of the rights and liberties of the people of the United Kingdom.

‘I venture to say that this is a miserable and a humiliating picture to draw of this country. Bear in mind that I am not speaking of Poland suffering under the

conquest of Russia. There is a gentleman, now a candidate for an Irish county, who is very great upon the wrongs of Poland; but I have found him always in the House of Commons taking sides with that great party which has systematically supported the wrongs of Ireland. I am not speaking about Hungary, or of Venice as she was under the rule of Austria, or of the Greeks under the dominion of the Turk, but I am speaking of Ireland—part of the United Kingdom—part of that which boasts itself to be the most civilised and the most Christian nation in the world.'

Mr. Bright went on to say that he believed it was impossible for a class to govern a nation wisely and justly. In Ireland, there had been a field in which all the principles of the Tory party had had their complete experiment and development; and yet the kingdom had been continually weakened—the harmony of the empire had been disturbed, and the mischief had not been confined to the United Kingdom, but had spread to the colonies. Canada was now defending itself from Irishmen hostile to England who had settled in the United States. The Government of Lord Derby was doing exactly that which the Government of Lord North did nearly a hundred years before—it was sending out troops across the Atlantic to fight Irishmen who were the bitter enemies of England on the American continent. If that were true, what conclusion could they come to? He cited two great evils which were chiefly at the root of this discontent—namely, the Established Church, and the tenure of land. 'I believe,' said Mr. Bright, 'that the removal of the Established Church would create a new political and social atmosphere in Ireland—that it would make the people feel that old things had passed away—that all things had become new—that an Irishman and his faith were no longer to be condemned in his own country—and that for the first time the English people and the English Parliament intended to do full justice to Ireland.' As to the land, the operation of the present custom was, that in Ireland they had bad farming, bad dwelling-houses, bad temper, and everything bad connected with the occupation and the culture of land in Ireland. One of the results—a result most appalling—was that the population were fleeing from the country and seeking a refuge in a distant land. The people were looking more to America than they were looking

to England. And when they considered how many Irishmen had found a refuge in America, he did not know how they could wonder at this attitude on their part.

Then followed this very striking passage in Mr. Bright's address:—

‘You will recollect that when the ancient Hebrew prophet prayed in his captivity, he prayed with his window opened towards Jerusalem. Yow know that the followers of Mohammed, when they pray, turn their faces towards Mecca. When the Irish peasant asks for food, and freedom, and blessing, his eye follows the setting sun; the aspirations of his heart reach beyond the wide Atlantic, and in spirit he grasps hands with the great Republic of the West. If this be so, I say, then, that the disease is not only serious, but it is even desperate; but desperate as it is, I believe there is a certain remedy for it, if the people and the Parliament of the United Kingdom are willing to apply it. Now, if it were possible, would it not be worth while to change the sentiments and improve the condition of the Irish cultivators of the soil? If we were to remove the State Church, there would still be a Church, but it would not be a supremacy Church. The Catholics of Ireland have no idea of saying that Protestantism in its various forms shall not exist in their Island. There would still be a Church, but it would be a free Church of a section of a free people.’

Who objected to this? asked the speaker. The men who were in favour of religious supremacy. Ireland had no greater enemy than the Protestant State Church. He then showed that neither honest Protestantism nor the honest landowner had any reason to fear the proposed change. As to the land question, he maintained that the interests of the public required that Parliament should secure to the tenant the property which he had invested on his farm. But more than that, he asked why in Ireland they should tolerate the law of primogeniture and the system of entails? He would go further still, and deal with the question of absenteeism. He proposed that a Parliamentary Commission should be empowered to treat for the purchase of large estates belonging to the English nobility, with a view of selling them to the tenantry of Ireland. ‘Now, here are some of them: the present Prime Minister, Lord Derby, Lord Lansdowne, Lord Fitzwilliam, the Marquis of Hertford, the Marquis of Bath, the Duke of Bedford, the Duke of Devonshire, and many others. They have estates in Ireland; many of them, I dare say, are just as well managed as any other estates

in the country ; but what you want is to restore to Ireland a middle-class proprietary of the soil ; and I venture to say that if these estates could be purchased and could be sold out farm by farm to the tenant occupiers in Ireland, that it would be infinitely better, in a conservative sense, than that they should belong to great proprietors living out of the country.'

The disease was desperate, Mr. Bright reiterated, and the remedy must be searching. ' I assert that the present system of government with regard to the Church and with regard to the land has failed disastrously in Ireland. Under it Ireland has become an object of commiseration to the whole world, and a discredit to the United Kingdom of which it forms a part. It is a land of many sorrows. Men fight for supremacy, and call it Protestantism ; they fight for evil and bad laws, and they call it acting for the defence of property.' If Irishmen were united, they might do almost anything they liked. Having advocated the extension of the constituencies, the right hon. gentleman closed with this very effective peroration :—

' In a speech delivered the other day in Belfast, much was said of the enforcement of the law ; but there was nothing said about any change or amendment in the law. With this party, terror is their only specific,—they have no confidence in allegiance except where there is no power to rebel. Now, I differ from these men entirely. I believe that at the root of a general discontent there is in all countries a general grievance and general suffering. (Cheers.) The surface of society is not incessantly disturbed without a cause. I recollect in the poem of the greatest of Italian poets, he tells us that as he saw in vision the Stygian lake, and stood upon its banks, he observed the constant commotion upon the surface of the pool, and his good instructor and guide explained to him the cause of it :

" This, too, for certain know, that underneath
The water dwells a multitude, whose sighs
Into these bubbles make the surface heave,
As thine eye tells thee wheresoe'er it turn."

(Cheers.) And I say that in Ireland, for generations back, the misery and the wrongs of the people have made their sign, and have found a voice in constant insurrection and disorder. I have said that Ireland is a country of many wrongs and of many sorrows. Her past lies almost all in shadow. Her present is full of anxiety and peril. Her future depends on the power of her people to substitute equality and justice for supremacy, and a generous patriotism for the spirit of faction. In the effort now making in Great Britain to create a free representation of the people you have the deepest interest. The people never wish to suffer, and they never wish to inflict injustice. (Cheers.) They have no sympathy with the wrong-

doer, whether in Great Britain or in Ireland; and when they are fairly represented in the Imperial Parliament, as I hope they will one day be, they will speedily give an effective and final answer to that old question of the Parliament of Kilkenny, "How comes it to pass that the King has never been the richer for Ireland?" (Loud cheers.)

Two days after delivering the above speech, Mr. Bright attended a public meeting held in the Mechanics' Institute, Dublin, when an address from the trades of the city was presented to him. Mr. James Haughton, J.P., occupied the chair. Mr. Bright's speech on this occasion was chiefly devoted to the Reform question, and this branch of it we have dealt with elsewhere. After showing the inequalities of Irish Parliamentary representation, however, and insisting upon the necessity for the ballot, Mr. Bright pointed out that a change in the electoral system would aid Ireland in obtaining justice. He continued: 'When I have thought of the condition of Ireland, of its sorrows and wrongs, of the discredit that its condition has brought upon the English, the Irish, and the British name, I have thought if I could be in all other things the same, but by birth an Irishman, there is not a town in this island I would not visit for the purpose of discussing the great Irish question, and of rousing my countrymen to some great and united action. I do not believe in the necessity of widespread and perpetual misery. I do not believe that we are placed on this island, and on this earth, that one man may be great and wealthy, and revel in every profuse indulgence, and five, six, nine, or ten men shall suffer the abject misery which we see so commonly in the world. With your soil, your climate, and your active and spirited race, I know not what you might not do. There have been reasons to my mind why soil and climate, and the labour of your population, have not produced general comfort and competence for all.'

Mr. Bright next enlarged upon the necessity for a cordial union, remarking that he did not ask them to join hands with supremacy and oppression, whether in Ireland or England. What he asked was that they would open their heart of hearts, and join hands for a real and thorough working union for freedom with the people of Great Britain. The hon. gentleman then re-stated his plan for

making many thousands of Irish farmers the owners of their farms. He said that he now gave a little further explanation on this subject, in order that those who had commented upon his plan should not repeat the very untrue and dishonourable comments they had made. He would not speak against the aristocracy, or against property, or against anything that was good. If Parliament were to appoint a Commission, and give it, say, at first up to the amount of five millions sterling, the power to negotiate or treat with the great families in England who had estates in Ireland, it was probable that some of those great estates might be bought at a not very unreasonable price. This would be the cheapest money that the Imperial Parliament ever expended, even though it became possessed of those estates at a cost considerably above the market price.

The speaker next showed how he proposed to work out his plan, and brought forward the following illustration :—

‘I will assume that this Commission is in possession of a considerable estate bought from some present owner of it. I will take one farm, which I will assume to be worth £1000, for which the present tenant is paying a rent of £50 a year. He has no lease; he has no security; he makes almost no improvement of any kind; and he is not quite sure whether, when he has saved a little more money, he will not take his family off to the United States. Now we will assume ourselves, if you like, to be that Commission, and that we have before us the farmer who is the tenant on that particular farm for which he pays £50 a year, without lease or security, and which I assume to be worth £1000. The Government, I believe, lends money to Irish landowners for drainage purposes at about $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. per annum. Suppose the Government were to say to this farmer, “You would not have any objection to become possessed of this farm?” “No, not the slightest,” he might answer, “but how is that to be done?” In this way: you may pay £50 a year, that is, 5 per cent. on one thousand pounds; the Government can afford to do these transactions at $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.; if you will pay £60 a year for a given number of years, which any of the actuaries of the insurance offices or any good arithmetician may soon calculate,—if you will pay £60 for your rent instead of £50, it may be for perhaps twenty years,—at the end of that time the farm will be yours without any further payment.

‘I want you to understand how this is. If the farmer paid ten pounds a year more than he now pays, towards buying his farm, and if the £1000 the Government would pay for the farm would not cost the Government more than £35, the difference between £35 and £60 being £25, would be the sum which that farmer, in his rent, would be paying to the Commission, that is,—to the Government,—for the redemption of his farm. Thus, at the end of a very few years, the farmer would possess his own farm, having a perfect security in the meantime. Nobody could turn him out if he paid his rent, and nobody could rob him for any improvement

he made on his land. . . . You will understand that I do not propose a forced purchase, or any confiscation. I would undertake even to give—if I were the Government—to every one of these landlords 20 per cent. more for his estate than it will fetch in the market in London or in Dublin; and I say that to do this would produce a marvellous change in the sentiments of the people, and in the condition of agriculture in Ireland.'

Mr. Bright said that he had been falsely charged with saying bitter things against the aristocracy, whereas he admitted that many of them were men of as undoubted patriotism as any in the island. He had also been told that if he lived in Ireland he would discover that it was the people who were wrong, and not the Government, or legislation. In 1849, and again in 1852, he had gone to Ireland expressly to examine this question. There was also no man in England who had more fully studied the evidence given before the celebrated Devon Commission in regard to Ireland than he had, and he was therefore in a position to discuss the Irish question. He asserted that the plans, the theories, the policy, the legislation of his opponents in this matter had all failed, signally, deplorably, disastrously, ignominiously; and therefore he had a right to come in and offer the people of Ireland, as he would offer to the people of Great Britain and the Imperial Parliament, a wise and just policy upon this question. He concluded by observing that if in past times he had felt an unquenchable sympathy with the sufferings of the Irish people, they might rely upon it that if there were an Irish member to speak for Ireland, he would find him heartily at his side.

In addressing his constituents at Birmingham on the 4th of February, 1868, Mr. Bright returned to the Irish question, and denied that he was hostile to the Protestant Church or to Protestantism, for he was himself a Protestant of Protestants. When the cheering which followed this declaration had subsided, he added, that he had no kind of religious sympathy with many of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, and when he spoke of the Protestant Church he was speaking purely of a political State organisation. If any one said that with a Parliament in Dublin the Irish people would permit such a political State Church to exist, he must surely believe that Ireland was no better than one huge lunatic asylum. Then why should our Parliament maintain a Church against the

opinions and repeated protests of the great majority of the Irish people? A supremacy party had been established with the idea of preserving the Union with England, and yet it had become, more than all other institutions, that which most imperilled the Union. They must no longer attempt to govern Ireland upon the principles and prejudices of the supremacy party. Mr. Bright, before closing his speech, related the following anecdote: 'I recollect when Daniel O'Connell was in the House of Commons, and on many occasions I sat by him. I asked him on one occasion if he would write me an autograph for a lady, a relative of mine, who wished to preserve it. He went into the lobby, and, taking a pen, he wrote these four lines:—

"Within that land was many a malcontent,
Who cursed the tyranny to which he bent;
That land full many a wringing despot saw
Who worked his tyranny in form of law."

One of the most important as well as one of the most comprehensive speeches Mr. Bright ever delivered on Ireland, was that spoken in the House of Commons on the 13th of March, 1868, during the debate on Mr. Maguire's motion, that the House should resolve itself into a Committee to take the condition of Ireland into immediate consideration. It was during this debate also that Mr. Gladstone made his momentous declaration against the Irish Church.

The discussion began on the 10th, when the member for Cork brought forward his motion. The chief causes of discontent in Ireland, he said, were the land grievance and the existence of the Established Church. "Until the tenant got security for his improvements, and was protected from the rapacity or caprice of his landlord, it would be vain to hope for tranquillity. Ireland would not be satisfied with another Royal Commission. Mr. Maguire described the Irish Church as a scandal and a monstrous anomaly, which Englishmen, if applied to themselves, would not tolerate for a single hour.

The Earl of Mayo brought forward the Irish proposals of the Conservative Government. He stated that a Commission would be

appointed to inquire into the whole state of the relations between landlord and tenant: and in the meantime a bill would be introduced providing for an easy compensation for money laid out in improvements, and another for rendering more efficient the working of Irish railways. The general education of the people was already under the consideration of a Commission, and it was proposed to grant a Charter to a Roman Catholic University. With regard to the Irish Church, it was not proposed to take any immediate action.

Mr. Horsman, Mr. J. Stuart Mill, and others, expressed their dissatisfaction with the proposals of the Government.

Mr. Bright rose on the 13th. He first described the state of Ireland, and referred to the alleged increase of material prosperity. 'If,' he said,—'and this has been already referred to by more than one speaker,—if it be true that with a considerable improvement in the physical condition of the people—if it be true that with a universality of education much beyond that which exists in this island—if it be true that after the measures that have been passed, and have been useful, there still remains in Ireland, first of all, what is called Fenianism, which is a reckless and daring exhibition of feeling—beyond that a very wide discontent and disloyalty—and beyond that, amongst the whole of the Roman Catholic population, universal dissatisfaction—and if that be so, surely my hon. friend the member for Cork—one of the most useful and eminent of the representatives of Ireland—is right in bringing this question before the House. And there is no question at this moment that we could possibly discuss connected with the interest or honour of the people that approaches in gravity and magnitude to that now before us.' This great effect must have some cause, and they were unworthy of their position as members of that House, and representatives of the people, if they did not endeavour to discover the cause, and to apply to it a remedy.

But that cause was well known to the Government, particularly to the Premier (Mr. Disraeli), as was shown by his celebrated phrase, 'on absentee aristocracy and an alien Church.' Dealing with the first of these two causes, Mr. Bright examined minutely the provisions of Lord Mayo's Bill, which he contended would never

work, from the multiplicity of transactions it would involve—there being 540,000 landholders or tenants in Ireland; and he preferred his own plan for the encouragement of a farmer proprietary, which he proceeded to detail. He added, ‘I am in favour of more proprietors; and some, of course, will be small and some will be large; but it would be quite possible for Parliament, if it thought fit to attempt anything of this kind, to fix a limit below which it would not assist the owner to sell or the purchaser to buy. I believe that you can establish a class of moderate proprietors, who will form a body intermediate between the great owners of land and those who are absolutely landless, which will be of immense service in giving steadiness, loyalty, and peace to the whole population of the island.’ But he was not proposing to buy up the whole of the land; he was only proposing to buy in cases where men were willing to sell.

If it were right, Mr. Bright urged, to lend money to tenants for improvements, as Lord Mayo proposed, why not lend money to tenants to buy land? Protesting again that he had no desire to interfere with the rights of property—for he would not apply his plan except in the instances mentioned—he showed that, without paying more annually than his present rent, a tenant in a little over thirty years might become the owner of his farm. His object was to secure in Ireland some few score thousands of a steady class between the large landowners and the landless—a class which would be thoroughly loyal, and would be the zealous enemy of Fenianism. He admitted that the time might arrive when Mr. Mill’s land remedy (which had been described as ‘confiscation’) would be necessary for Ireland; but he held that in every country where there was no class but landlord and tenant, with no manufactures to absorb the population, the condition of the cultivator of the soil must inevitably be degraded. Mr. Mill had scruples on the question of the ballot, but even he believed that it might be tried with advantage in Ireland. Being greeted with some cries of ‘No, no!’ Mr. Bright said, ‘Do hon. gentlemen think it not necessary? I was talking, only two days ago, to a member of this House who sat on one of the Irish election committees—the Waterford committee, I think,—and he said: “We could not unseat the members, though the

evidence went to show a frightful state of things ; it was one of the most orderly elections they have in that country—only three men killed and twenty-eight seriously wounded.” After all, we may smile, and some of you may laugh at this, but it is not a thing to be laughed at. It is a very serious matter, but it exists in no country in the world where the ballot is in operation.’

Coming next to the Church question, Mr. Bright described the Ministerial proposal as grotesque and imbecile. The establishment of a Catholic University could have no effect on Fenianism ; it had been received with general disfavour ; and, like the dual vote of last year, when it had served its object it would probably disappear. For the evil which they had to combat, the remedy offered by the Government was no remedy at all. On this head Mr. Bright amusingly observed—

‘ It reminds me of an anecdote which is related by Addison. Writing about the curious things which happened in his time, he says that there was a man who made a living by cheating the country people. I do not know whether it was in Buckinghamshire or not. (Laughter.) He was not a Cabinet Minister—he was only a mountebank—(great laughter),—and he set up a stall, and sold pills that were very good against the earthquake. (Roars of laughter.) Well, that is about the state of things that we are in now. There is an earthquake in Ireland. Does anybody doubt it? I will not go into the evidence of it, but I will say that there has been a most extraordinary alarm—some of it extravagant, I will admit—throughout the whole of the three kingdoms ; and although Fenianism may be but a low, a reckless, and an ignorant conspiracy, the noble lord has admitted that there is discontent and disaffection in the country ; and when the member for one of the great cities of Ireland comes forward and asks the Imperial Parliament to discuss this great question—this social and political earthquake under which Ireland is heaving—the noble lord comes forward and offers that there shall be a clerically-governed endowed University for the sons, I suppose, of the Catholic gentlemen of Ireland. I have never heard a more unstatesmanlike or more unsatisfactory proposition ; and I believe the entire disfavour with which it has been received in this House is only a proper representation of the condemnation which it will receive from the great majority of the people of the three kingdoms.’ (Cheers.)

Mr. Bright said he would not join in the offensive terms used by Mr. Horsman and Mr. Lowe ; there could be no good in attacking either the Catholic population or the Catholic hierarchy of Ireland. They had their duty straight before them, which was to do both the hierarchy and the people justice. Protestant

ascendency in Ireland, as represented by a State Church, he believed to be doomed, and perfect religious equality on the voluntary principle must be established in its place. Sir Robert Peel had increased the grant to Maynooth, and he (Mr. Bright) was one of the very few persons on the Liberal side of the House who opposed the grant. He was as kindly disposed to the Catholics as Sir Robert Peel, but he did not believe this was the path of tranquillisation, and if it were tried for the pacification of Ireland now it would fail. There might be difficulties in carrying out perfect religious equality, but they must be faced; and, considering Lord Russell's plan for the division of Church property amongst various bodies—though he spoke of its author with great respect—as forty years too late, Mr. Bright developed a plan of his own for the purpose. He would disestablish and disendow all Churches alike; the *Regium Donum* must go as well as the Maynooth grant. But as the life interests of the Protestant Bishops and priests must be preserved, so must the life interests of the Presbyterian ministers and of Maynooth College be provided for. Where the congregations of existing Protestant churches would undertake to repair them and the parsonage houses, they might be left in possession of them. Of course, no more bishops, except on the footing of Scotch bishops, would be created; and if the State granted any provision at the outset to either of the three religious bodies, it must become its absolute property, entirely free from the control of the State. The whole of the Church property being Irish property, it must be disposed of in accordance with the desires of the Irish people. Though not sanguine that Mr. Disraeli would be able to deal radically with it, he should yet be delighted to co-operate with him in settling this question.

Exhorting Protestants, Catholics, and Nonconformists alike to get rid of passion in discussing this subject, Mr. Bright thus concluded:—

'We are, after all, of one religion. I imagine that there will come a time in the history of the world when men will be astonished that Catholics and Protestants have had so much animosity against and suspicion of each other. I accept the belief in a grand passage which I once met with in the writings of the illustrious founder

of the colony of Pennsylvania. He says that "The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion, and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the diverse liveries they wear here make them strangers." Now, may I ask the House to act in this spirit, and then our work will be easy. (Cheers.) The noble lord, towards the conclusion of his speech, spoke of the cloud which rests at present over Ireland. It is a dark and heavy cloud, and its darkness extends over the feelings of men in all parts of the British Empire. But there is a consolation which we may all take to ourselves. An inspired king and bard and prophet has left us words which are not only the expression of a fact, but which we may take as the utterance of a prophecy. He says, "To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." Let us try in this matter to be upright. Let us try to be just. (Cheers.) That cloud will be dispelled. The dangers which surround us will vanish, and we may yet have the happiness of leaving to our children the heritage of an honourable citizenship in a united and prosperous empire.' (Loud cheers.)

This peroration—which is one of the finest and yet simplest of Mr. Bright's efforts—and indeed the whole speech, made a marked impression upon the House. Ministers began to feel that the policy they had foreshadowed was inadequate, and their fears were turned into absolute certainty when Mr. Gladstone spoke on the last night of the debate.

The right hon. gentleman emphatically declared, amidst the vehement cheers of the Opposition, that the Established Church of Ireland must cease to exist. Religious equality must be established, difficult though the operation might be; and Mr. Gladstone said that on the whole he agreed very much with Mr. Bright's plan for effecting this great operation.

Mr. Disraeli bewailed his lot at being thus suddenly called upon to deal with this great crisis, and expressed his conviction that if the Church in Ireland were violently abolished, it would add immensely to the elements of discord, violence, and confiscation.

Satisfied with the result of the debate, Mr. Maguire withdrew his motion. A few days later Mr. Gladstone tabled his resolutions, affirming the necessity for disestablishing and disendowing the Established Church of Ireland. Lord Stanley gave notice of an amendment to the effect that the question ought to be reserved for the decision of a new Parliament.

On the 30th of March the debate began. It was opened by



Mr. Gladstone, in a powerful speech, delivered in a densely crowded House, and amidst manifestations of eager and absorbing interest. Lord Stanley also spoke at length, and the debate was carried on for four nights by adjournments. Lord Cranborne (now Marquis of Salisbury) said that while ready to meet the resolutions with a plain, straightforward negative, he declined to support an amendment the object of which was merely to gain time, and to enable the Government to keep the cards in their hands for another year, to shuffle as they pleased. Mr. Gathorne Hardy delivered a 'no surrender' speech—which was warmly cheered by the Conservatives—affirming that he would not be a party to any measure for disestablishing the Church which upheld the light of the Reformation in Ireland.

Mr. Bright spoke with great vigour in support of the resolutions. He began by remarking on the considerable change, if not of view, at least of expression, which had characterised the debate. Even Lord Cranborne had seemed to admit that the time was near at hand for surrendering his cherished principle of an Establishment, while the Government spoke with different voice from night to night. Mr. Hardy, in a very good speech, though it was one from which he (Mr. Bright) differed, had answered Lord Stanley, and probably Mr. Disraeli would answer Mr. Hardy; this was the result of Government by a minority. Mr. Bright was very felicitous and effective in exposing the difficulties of the situation :—

'All this shows us that the House is in a wrong position. We have a minority in office which cannot assert its own views with safety, nor can it with any more safety adopt our views; and thus, when, on that side of the House, a Minister gets up and makes what is called a liberal speech on this question to us who are in opposition, that creates discontent; and then another Minister rises and makes a speech of an exactly opposite character, to reconcile that discontent. There is, in fact, confusion and chaos in the House. (Hear, hear.) We have a Government which is not a Government, and we have an Opposition which is not an Opposition, because really we do not oppose anything that you propose. Your propositions are not based upon your own principles, which you held when you sat on this side of the House, but on our principles, and therefore we are not in opposition at all, but we help you as much as possible to enforce, not your own principles, but ours. Whatever compensation it may be to right hon. gentlemen who sit on that bench and enjoy the dignities and emoluments of office, I think there are many honourable

men on whom I am looking at this moment who do not observe the course of these proceedings with entire satisfaction.' (Cheers.)

Dealing with the main question, Mr. Bright pointed out that the disestablishment, which had been described as a 'revolution,' affected little more than half a million of people, or 100,000 families, about equal to the population of Glasgow, or Liverpool, or Manchester. And yet it was for this that they had twelve bishops and archbishops, and an expensive Establishment. If the proposed change were effected, the Irish Protestants would only be left in the same position as the majority of the Scotch people, nearly the whole of the Welsh people, half of the English people, and the whole of our colonists. There were only two pretences on which a State Church could be justified—religious and political. As a religious institution for the conversion of the Roman Catholics, the Irish Church had been a deplorable failure. 'What is more than that, I think it can be demonstrated that the existence of the Protestant Church in Ireland, whether missionary or not in pretence, has not only not converted the Catholics themselves, but has made it absolutely impossible that anybody else, or any other Church, should convert them. Because, if you look how the Church has been connected with the State, and with the politics of the country, with the supremacy of the landed proprietors, with the supremacy of the Protestant party, with all the dark records of the past, you will see the effect has been to make Catholicism in Ireland not only a faith, but a patriotism.' The political influence of Rome Mr. Bright held to be a great calamity. As a political institution, he continued, the Irish Church had been equally a failure; for although the State for years had defended it by the sword, the present condition of Ireland was anarchy subdued by force.

Disestablishment, Mr. Bright asserted—notwithstanding a few faint denials—was desired by an influential and wise minority of Irish Protestants. From peer to peasant the Roman Catholics were unanimous in its favour, and the people of England and Scotland would eagerly welcome this great act of atonement for past errors. If such evils had been produced in any of our colonies by a State Church, Parliament would have abolished it at once. As

to any danger to the Church of England, her greatest enemy was not Mr. Miall and the Liberation Society, but zeal—the chief peril of all establishments—whether developed in Ritualism or Evangelicalism. As long as she preserved internal harmony, the boldest prophet would not predict the day of her downfall. The speaker then reasoned calmly with the Ministerialists, and dealt with their fears. ‘Why should you be afraid? Even children, we know, can be induced, by repeated practice, to go into a dark room without fear. You have always, somebody said the other night, lions in the path; but I will not dignify them with the name of lions—they are but hobgoblins. Now, when you have seen and handled them,—as you have a great many times since I have been in the habit of speaking face to face with you,—these things are found, after all, to be only hobgoblins; you have learned, after all, that they are perfectly harmless; and when you thought we were doing you harm, and upsetting the constitution, you have found that, after all, we were doing you good, and that the constitution was rather stronger than it was before. Let me point out for a moment some of these changes that were found at the time to be of great difficulty, but have been found to be very wise and good since.’

Mr. Bright then referred to the changes which had been effected in the colonial system, mainly through the efforts of Sir William Molesworth and Joseph Hume; to Sir Robert Peel's financial reforms; and to the abolition of the protective system. ‘Free Trade was a frightful monster. But the protective system is gone; and now every candid man amongst you will admit that industry, being more free throughout the country, is better rewarded, and that the land, which you said would go out of cultivation, and become of no value, sells for a higher price in the market than it ever brought before.’ The balance of power, too, which was once considered the beginning and end of our foreign policy, was gone, and yet England was just as much respected as when she was ready to meddle in every stupid quarrel that occurred upon the Continent of Europe. Lastly, there was the question of the representation. It had been a hobgoblin for years, but the Conservatives had found out last year that it was not so monstrous a thing after

all, and had supported, almost enthusiastically, Mr. Disraeli's Reform Bill. And the Prime Minister would tell them that, as a consequence of the enlarged suffrage, Parliament would henceforth be more strong and more venerated by the people than it had ever been before. If that was true of Parliament, it was equally true of the Throne.

Mr. Bright said he did not mention these things by way of reproach, for all had to learn. On this question of the Irish Church, Mr. Gladstone would probably admit that his opinions had been ripening for a series of years. That was greatly to the credit, not only of his head, but of his heart. 'We have seen even amongst you a progress in many things—a progress which is most gratifying to me—that is a very small matter; but it is a very wholesome indication that the minds of men are becoming more open to the consideration of great principles in connection with great public questions. And this gives us promise that in future we shall have—as, no doubt, we shall have—a Government more in accordance with public opinion and public interests than we have had in past times. In my opinion, the changes that have been made in our time are the glory of our time; and I believe that our posterity will regard them as the natural and blessed fruits of the growth of intelligence in our day. I mention these things to urge you not to close your ears to the arguments, nor to close your hearts to the impressions of justice, which must assail you with regard to this question which is now being debated so much in Great Britain and Ireland.'

A very remarkable meeting held at Limerick, said Mr. Bright, in concluding, had shown that there was a far more healthy tone of mind in Ireland than there had been for a very long period—an indication of a growing belief that Parliament was sufficiently strong to carry this measure of justice and reconciliation. He hoped they would not increase the discontent of Ireland, and play the game of the Fenians, by refusing this great boon:—

'Let us take this Irish State Church; let us take it, not with a rude—I am against rudeness and harshness in legislative action—but if not with a rude, still with a resolute grasp. If you adopt the policy we recommend, you will pluck up a weed

which pollutes the air. ("Oh, oh.") I will give hon. gentlemen consolation in the conclusion of the sentence—I say you will pluck up a weed which pollutes the air; but you will leave a free Protestant Church, which will be hereafter an ornament and a grace to all those who may be brought within the range of its influence. (Cheers.) Sir, I said in the beginning of my observations that the people of three kingdoms are waiting with anxious suspense for the solution of this question. Ireland waits and longs. I appeal to the right hon. gentleman the member for Limerick (Mr. Monsell); I appeal to that meeting, the character of which he can describe, and perhaps may describe, to the House; and I say that Ireland waits and longs for a great act of reconciliation. I say, further, that England and Scotland are eager to make atonement for past crimes and past errors; and I say, yet further, that it depends upon us, this House of Commons, this Imperial Parliament, whether that reconciliation shall take place, and whether that atonement shall at length be made.' (Cheers.)

The debate closed with able speeches by Mr. Disraeli and Mr. Gladstone, and Lord Stanley's amendment was lost by a majority of 60. When Mr. Gladstone's motion to go into Committee was put, there appeared—For the motion, 328; against, 272; majority, 56. This was a larger majority than had been expected for Mr. Gladstone's motion. The House went into Committee; but after the first resolution had been formally put, the Chairman was directed to report progress. Meetings called by the friends and opponents of Disestablishment respectively were now held in London and the provinces. The question caused great excitement, and much intemperate language was used, especially by the supporters of the Irish Church, whose animadversions upon Mr. Gladstone were violent and personal in the extreme.

After the Easter recess the contest was resumed in the House of Commons. At the close of a long debate, Mr. Gladstone's resolution, condemnatory of the Irish Establishment, was carried by 330 to 265, showing a majority against the Government of 65. The former majority in favour of Disestablishment having thus been increased, Mr. Disraeli rose, and said that as the division had altered the relations of the Government with the House, he moved that the House should adjourn, in order that the Government might consider their position.

On the 4th of May Ministers tendered explanations in both Houses. In the Commons, Mr. Disraeli stated that he had advised Her Majesty to dissolve Parliament, but at the same time placed

the resignation of himself and his colleagues at Her Majesty's disposal. The Queen took time for consideration, and at a second interview declined to accept the Premier's resignation, but signified her readiness to dissolve Parliament as soon as the state of public business permitted. Under these circumstances, he (Mr. Disraeli) had advised Her Majesty that there might be a dissolution in the autumn.

This explanation was deemed very unsatisfactory by the Opposition, who held that the Government should have resigned without qualification, this being the true constitutional mode of dealing with such a crisis.

Mr. Gladstone protested emphatically against Mr. Disraeli's unconstitutional doctrine, that every Minister carried in his pocket a right to dissolve a Parliament not elected under his influence. Mr. Lowe said Parliament was asked to give a ten months' lease of office to a Government which neither trusted it nor was trusted by it. Mr. Bright was also very indignant, and commented upon the humiliating attitude in which the Government was placed, maintaining that it was merely for the sake of prolonging his own term of office that Mr. Disraeli had made this outrageous demand on the indulgence of Parliament. But the Government had no right, he asserted, to a dissolution; and they had, therefore, no claim to remain in office when they could carry nothing of their own but a sixpenny income tax. Mr. Bright cited precedents in connection with this matter, and said that no decent pretence had been offered for departing from the constitutional course of resigning after such signally adverse votes. The Irish and Scotch bills could be more easily passed by a Government really friendly to Reform, and the only result of the present action would be that the Irish Church could not be disestablished until 1870. On the following evening Mr. Disraeli said he had advised a dissolution without any reference to the consideration of old or new constituencies. In reply to further questions, he denied that he had been the first to introduce the Queen's name improperly into the discussion, and said that if any other difficulty arose it would be necessary for him to seek another audience,*and to take the pleasure of Her Majesty.

A meeting was held in St. James's Hall on the 6th of May to protest against the disestablishment of the Irish Church. The Archbishop of Canterbury presided, and resolutions were proposed and spoken to by the Lord Mayor, the Bishop of Oxford, the Bishop of London, and Dean Stanley. The uncompromising temper of the meeting will be best understood when we state that an observation made by Dean Stanley, to the effect that the traditions of the Liberal party in this country were all in favour of the union between Church and State, was received with such a storm of disapprobation that the Dean was unable to gain a further hearing, and was compelled to resume his seat.

On the following day Mr. Gladstone's second and third Irish Church resolutions were carried in Committee in the House of Commons without a division. A debate followed concerning the withdrawal of the Maynooth and other grants, and considerable difference of opinion was manifested amongst the Liberal members. Mr. Disraeli was not present during the proceedings, and displeasure was expressed at his absence. On returning to the House, the Premier said it was not his duty to obtrude his advice on the House with respect to every possible topic. The discussion, he added, had only anticipated what he always expected would be the case, that there would be a quarrel among the Liberal party over the division of the plunder.

These observations drew a remarkable and pointed philippic from Mr. Bright. Having observed that there had been nothing to warrant Mr. Disraeli's parting shot against the resolutions, and that there were few thoughtful men on public questions in the kingdom who were not in favour of the measure for disestablishment, Mr. Bright thus retorted upon the Prime Minister :—

‘I have held consistently for twenty years the conviction which the right hon. gentleman at the head of the Government himself held then, and which, if it were possible now to put him under an accurate examination from which he could not flinch, he would be obliged to say that he holds now ; because, on a recent occasion, he admitted that the main sentiment of that speech which he delivered twenty-five years ago was right. But I am in a different position from the right hon. gentleman. I have not been endeavouring to climb the ladder of Parliamentary promotion and notoriety. (“Oh,” and cheers.) No, Sir, I have only had the single object—so far

as I have had anything to do with Irish questions—to promote what appeared to be just to that country, and which would tend to the advantage of the United Kingdom. The right hon. gentleman the other night, in a manner at once pompous and servile, talked at large of the interviews which he had had with his Sovereign. I venture to say that a Minister who deceives his Sovereign is as guilty as the conspirator who would dethrone her. (“Oh,” and cheers.) I do not charge the right hon. gentleman with deceiving his Sovereign; but if he has not changed the opinion which he held twenty-five years ago, and which he has said in the main was right, then I fear that he has not stated all that it was his duty to state in the interviews which he had with his Sovereign. Let me tell hon. gentlemen opposite, and the right hon. gentleman in particular, that any man in this country who puts the Sovereign in the front of a great struggle like this into which it may be we are about to enter—who points to the Irish people, and says from the floor of this House, “Your Queen holds the flag under which we, the enemies of religious equality and justice to Ireland, are marshalled,”—I say that the Minister who does that is guilty of a very high crime and a great misdemeanour against his Sovereign and against his country. And there is no honour, and there is no reputation, there is no glory, there is no future fame that any Minister can gain by conduct like this that will acquit him to posterity of one of the most grievous offences against his country which a Prime Minister can possibly commit.’ (Cheers.)

The House was in an electrical condition, and every word of this strong condemnation of the Premier told both upon it and also upon Mr. Disraeli. The latter himself never made a more excited and angry retort upon a political opponent, and that he felt it keenly was apparent from his brief reply, in which he charged Mr. Bright with indulging in stale invective, and challenged him to bring his charges formally before the House.

Mr. Gladstone’s resolutions affirming the necessity for disestablishing the Irish Church, and abolishing the grant to Maynooth and the *Regium Donum*, were reported to the House on the 8th of May. In answer to the address presented to her, the Queen replied that she would not allow her interest in the temporalities of the Church in Ireland to stand in the way of the consideration of the proposed measure, and on the 13th Mr. Gladstone introduced his Irish Church Suspensory Bill. The debate on the second reading took place on the 22nd, when the chief speakers were Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Gathorne Hardy, and Mr. Disraeli. On a division, there appeared—For the second reading, 312; against, 258;—majority, 54. The bill passed through its remaining stages without difficulty.

When the measure came before the House of Lords, it was

debated with unusual ability and eloquence on both sides. The speeches of Lords Granville, Derby, Carnarvon, and Salisbury, the Duke of Argyll, the Bishop of Oxford, and the Lord Chancellor were especially powerful. The second reading was negatived on a division by 192 to 97; the rejection of the measure by the Lords did not come with surprise upon the Opposition, who now looked forward to the impending general election, anticipating that the country would pronounce unmistakably in favour of Mr. Gladstone's disestablishment policy.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bright actively pleaded the cause of justice to Ireland in the country. On the 3rd of June, 1868, he was present by invitation at the annual meeting of the Welsh National Reform Association, held at Liverpool. Mr. W. Williams, a member of the Liverpool Town Council, presided, and the object of the gathering was to assist the progress of Reform in the Principality, and in particular the more equitable distribution of Parliamentary representation.

Mr. Bright began his address by saying that the chairman was not far wrong when he described Liverpool as the capital city of the Principality of Wales, for although geographically it was in the county of Lancaster, it contained not less than sixty thousand natives of Wales—a larger number than were found in any purely Welsh town. Referring next to the great question of the continuance or removal of the Protestant State Church in Ireland, he said he hoped one of the results of that meeting would be that the verdict of the nation should not be given without the voice of Wales being heard in it. The Welsh were geographically nearest to Ireland; they had themselves had a remarkable experience in Church matters, and they had a strong wish that justice should be done to Ireland. The speaker said that there had never been any real union between Great Britain and Ireland, and the inevitable result of three hundred years of government such as Ireland had experienced had been three hundred years of misery, of discontent, of conspiracy, and of insurrection. It was only about one hundred years ago that the cruel rule of the English Government had relaxed, and not until 1829 that a Roman Catholic was permitted to take his seat in the House of Commons.

Since 1829 there had been a much more merciful and just administration. But the supremacy had been continued, and the sign and symbol of it was the Protestant Establishment in Ireland.

The real question before the country, said Mr. Bright, was not the question of State establishments. It was one purely and wholly political. The House of Commons, by an absolute majority of all the members of the House, had declared against the Irish Establishment; and whether a man accepted the principle of State Churches as a wise one, or whether he rejected it on his (Mr. Bright's) grounds, they must reject the Irish Establishment. 'Still more so on the principle of equal justice in the nation, on the principle of what is best and what is beneficial for the empire, we must in either case equally and emphatically condemn the Irish State Church. Suppose it were proposed for the first time to found a State Church in Ireland, is there one single being out of Bedlam—I doubt if there is one in Bedlam—who would even suggest that the State Church to be founded in Ireland should be of the Protestant Episcopal creed?' The speaker then went on to observe that out of a population of six million persons in Ireland, 4,500,000 belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. Half a million belonged to the Protestant Episcopal Church, and about half a million to the Presbyterian Church. The census gave under 700,000 of Church Protestants, but this overstated the numbers. 'Now, if we knew, being these four and a half millions, that this little Church of half a million was planted among us by those who had conquered our fathers, if we knew also that this little Church was associated with everything that had been hostile to our national interests and national prosperity, and if we knew further that it absorbed incomes amounting to not less than £700,000 or £800,000 sterling per year, these incomes being derived from national property amounting to probably £13,000,000 or £14,000,000 sterling,—I say that if we were of those four and a half millions, let me ask every man of you whether we should not feel that we had a just cause of complaint, and that there was a national grievance in our country that required to be speedily redressed.'

The Church in England or Wales, he continued, was not a symbol of conquest: but the Irish Church was a great imperial

question. It was a question of the empire, of union, or of civil strife; it was a question of strength or weakness to the nation. Who wished to make the Irish Church permanent? The Tory party in Parliament and the country. This party had been opposed to almost every measure of wisdom and of justice that had been proposed in regard to either England or Ireland. Mr. Bright then showed that in 1833 there were in connection with the Irish Church not less than twenty-two bishops, receiving an income of more than £130,000 a year, and from 1500 to 2000 clergymen,—all to teach a form of Protestantism to a population not larger than the population of Liverpool. The number of bishops was ultimately reduced from twenty-two to twelve, but not without a great outcry. He then went on to remark that at St. James's Hall recently the archbishops and bishops of the Church of England had been on the 'stump,' as they described it in America; and when so admirable a man as the Dean of Westminster began in his speech to approach the question in a moderate and rational manner, he was positively hissed down. He (Mr. Bright) was only sorry that the Dean mistook his duty in finding his way to that meeting. There were various ideas as to the object of the meeting. One said it was a meeting of a trades union; another, not less ingenious or less accurate, said it was a meeting of shareholders in a very lucrative concern, who fancied by some possibility their dividends might be reduced. Now he had no objection to these important and dignified persons discussing public questions; he wished they would do it oftener. But he never knew them meet to promote peace and to condemn war. When the great question of slavery agitated the country, there was no combined and unanimous movement in regard to it. The archbishops and bishops never deemed it their duty to express an opinion upon the Corn Laws. Nor had they come forward in any combined manner to expose the sufferings and denounce the wrongs practised upon their poorer countrymen. But now, when they thought that the Church of England was being menaced by the proceedings being taken in regard to the Church in Ireland, they were all up in arms, and one would suppose that the whole country and Christianity were going at once to ruin.

This withering rebuke was as fully justified as Charles Dickens's stricture upon the 'right reverends and wrong reverends of every order,' from another point of view. Mr. Bright went on to observe that all that Mr. Gladstone and his supporters now proposed to do was to place the Protestant Episcopalians of Ireland in the same position exactly as the Welsh Free Churches, the Wesleyan Churches, the Free Churches of Scotland, and the Colonial and American Churches. But they gave them the advantage of their existing buildings. Yet the archbishops and bishops who met in St. James's Hall cried out as though they were about to perpetrate the grossest and most intolerable cruelty to which men had ever been subjected. If the bill passed, not only would a chance be afforded to the Irish Church, but strife would cease, and justice would have become in Ireland a guiding principle of the Imperial Parliament. To the question, Can Wales do anything to help on this great movement? he replied, 'You could not, in the times that are past, contend with the power of England; but now you may unite your power with the power of all men who love freedom either in England or in Ireland; and you may, by a significant addition to our Parliamentary majority, contribute to the success of that great question which is now before Parliament and the country.'

It was the question of the hour, the speaker continued. There were many efforts made to deceive the electors; the First Minister (Mr. Disraeli) was skilled in phrases, especially in phrases that were calculate to deceive. But he understood the question as well as any one. More than twenty years ago he condemned the Church of Ireland in language as forcible as any which he (Mr. Bright) could use, as an alien Church. Now, after making offers to the Church of Rome, and finding that Parliament was not in favour of them, he did his best to set up the old and evil cry of 'No Popery' at the next election. Addressing his Welsh hearers, in conclusion, Mr. Bright said: 'I hold you, I bind you to this, that you are for justice to Catholic and Protestant in Ireland, established on the voluntary principle; and I argue that you must have this opinion, and that you will support it, because you cannot

sever Christianity from justice, and because you know and feel that to do justice to Ireland and to Irishmen must be to add honour and unity and strength to the Crown and to the people of this great empire.'

A vote of thanks having been passed to Mr. Bright, the hon. gentleman, in the course of some remarks acknowledging it, said that he had been speculating upon what would occur if they were defeated at the general election. If this result should take place through a cry of 'No Popery,' or 'Church in danger,' or any other cry, there would be in Ireland a far greater discontent and a far greater resolution to achieve, if it were possible, the separation of Ireland from Great Britain. Now, we have only a right to insist that the United Kingdom shall not be severed if we are willing to do full justice to the different nations of which it is composed; and therefore there is a question far more important than whether this man or that man shall be Prime Minister, or whether a particular Cabinet, shuffling and offensive as this Cabinet is, or a more honest Cabinet which may succeed it, should govern the country.' The question of justice to Ireland was greater than this. 'I will hope, and I will speak so far as I am able, and as opportunity may be given me, in favour of the great measure which is now before Parliament, for I believe it to be essential to the unity and the strength and the harmony of the United Kingdom; and I believe that, instead—to take the language of the present Prime Minister, offensive and impudent as it was—instead of dimming the lustre of the British Crown, that it will be regarded in history as one of the most honourable events in the reign of the Queen, if under her mild sceptre this United Kingdom can really be united, and Ireland made as contented and loyal as any other portion of the empire.'

During the summer of 1868 Mr. Bright became the guest of Mr. George Peabody, the distinguished American philanthropist, at Castle Connell, in Ireland. In view of the general election then pending, and the fact that the question of the disestablishment of the Irish Church was uppermost in the public mind, Mr. Bright was invited to a breakfast in the Limerick Athenæum on the 14th of July. He accepted the invitation, and delivered an address on

Irish affairs. In the outset, he observed that he came before the Irish people as a simple citizen, to help in discussing a question which was exciting intense interest throughout the whole of Great Britain. He hoped he might say without pretentiousness or egotism that in his humble way he endeavoured always to speak publicly to his countrymen as a preacher of political righteousness and justice. He believed it was in this way only that the unity, true glory, and the happiness of states could be built up.

Mr. Bright observed that during the twenty years which had elapsed since he was in Limerick before, there had been a considerable change, in some respects for the better, in Ireland. When he was there previously, famine and pestilence had scarcely completed their melancholy duty. When he said duty, he regarded famine and pestilence as instruments appointed by Providence to track the ignorance, the folly, and the crimes of men. But the population had been greatly thinned by an emigration which he believed to be unexampled in modern times. It did not, however, follow that the remaining portion of the population was in a better political condition; and at that moment they met under a suspension of the British constitution as regarded Ireland and its whole population. Besides the frequent suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, there was in Ireland a great military force altogether disproportioned to any necessity there could be for it in a country that was at once well governed, prosperous, and contented. There were some who thought that the only true and lasting remedy for Irish discontent was to be found either in the repeal of the Act of Union or in absolute independence. He hoped that all such would listen to his arguments upon this serious question.

The speaker went on to remark that he was willing and anxious to supplement the fraudulent Act of Union by deeds of generosity and of justice which should really unite the three kingdoms. What he would propose, if it were possible for him to dictate the policy of the imperial Parliament towards Ireland, would be to undo—absolutely to undo—the territorial and ecclesiastical arrangements maintained during the past two or three hundred years, though he would do all this without inflicting upon any living man the smallest act

of injustice in connection with his personal interests in those territorial and ecclesiastical arrangements. As to the question of the land, he had already stated in Dublin and Birmingham, and also in the House of Commons, that his plan was to restore to the skilled farmers of Ireland, or those amongst them who saved money, a proprietary right in the soil of the country. But it should be done through their own industry, and it should be free from the slightest taint of injustice, or of spoliation upon the present proprietors of the soil.

Coming to the question of the Irish Church, Mr. Bright said he suspected there were very few faithful and honest-minded Protestants in Ireland who would say that they approved of the ecclesiastical arrangements made for the country by England three centuries ago. There were now not more than 500,000 persons attending places of worship in connection with the Established Church in Ireland, and yet they had provided for them by the State more than £600,000 per annum. If the State were to provide in a similar manner for the other religious bodies of the population of the United Kingdom, it would absorb an annual sum of at least £36,000,000. If he had before him faithful and earnest Christian men of the Protestant Church, he would ask them whether, if they had to begin afresh, they would make such ecclesiastical arrangements as at present existed; whether these existing arrangements had been such as to justify the principle on which they had been based; and whether the State Church in Ireland had done anything to promote effectual union with England, or whether it had not rather been a bar to that union. As a political institution, the Church had had much to do with the tendency to rebellion in Ireland, and it would be impossible to find another example of such a state of things. The Church was a symbol of ancient terror, and not in any sensible degree a symbol of present peace. It stimulated the hostility of those whom it insulted against the English power. It was as much anti-English as anti-Irish, because it made it impossible for the Irish people to be in perfect harmony with England.

Mr. Bright referred to the alarms which the prospect of disestablishment was producing, and insisted upon their groundlessness,

illustrating his view by the case of the abolition of the stamp and paper duties. It was predicted that the respectable journals would be ruined by the competition of inferior productions, but instead of that the new papers were quite equal to the old, and the latter had been improved. He was one of those who did not believe that the Established Church of Ireland would go to absolute ruin in the manner which many of its friends were so fearful of. The churches and parsonage houses, which had cost millions, would be left to the congregations so long as they would undertake to keep them in repair. Under a free voluntary system, the members of the Church would have power to control their organisation, free from Acts of Parliament, and thus quietly regulate their own creed and discipline. A grand bond of sympathy and union would thus be established, and instead of the ravings of frantic Orangemen, they would see the enlightened zeal of Christian men and women, acting in the spirit of a free and zealous Church.

But, whatever might be the fears indulged on this subject, he believed that the changes which were dreaded were now unavoidable. The hour appeared to have come; and the House of Commons had pronounced a sentence which the new constituencies of the United Kingdom would confirm by a still greater majority. Would not the Irish counties make one supreme and stupendous effort in that great coming crisis? It was not a time for shams, and it would add greatly to smoothing the operation of this important change, even to those who were most fearful of its consequences, if they found the almost unanimous opinion of the three kingdoms in favour of it.

In closing his address, Mr. Bright said there came to his aid, when he thought of this question, a deep and abiding faith in justice—the miracle-worker amongst men. The people of England and Scotland were preparing to tender to Ireland a great offer of justice at the general election in November. ‘But the Irish people must help them with will and with heart. There can be no great measure of this kind accomplished unless all concerned lend willing hands; and there can be no great act of national and historical reconciliation unless all the parties hitherto opposed are willing to be reconciled. We are met—your kind address has referred to it—we are met in

the city of the violated treaty—violated, as I admit, incessantly during almost two centuries of time. Let us make a new treaty—not written on parchment—not bound with an oath. Its conditions should be these : justice on the part of Great Britain ; forgiveness on the part of Ireland. It shall be written in the hearts of three nations ; and we will pray to Him who is the common Father of all peoples, and in whose hand are the destinies of all states, that He will make it last for ever and for ever inviolate.’

The forecast of the elections in which Mr. Bright indulged was amply borne out by the event. In November, Mr. Disraeli’s appeal to the country was made, and the electors by an enormous majority pronounced against the Ministry, and in favour of Mr. Gladstone’s Irish Church policy. We shall have something to say elsewhere concerning the elections, and Mr. Bright’s acceptance of office in the Cabinet formed by Mr. Gladstone. Suffice it to state here, that the Premier resigned office at once, without waiting for the assembling of the new Parliament, and Mr. Gladstone became Prime Minister.

CHAPTER XXV.

DISESTABLISHMENT AND THE LAND QUESTION.

Mr. Gladstone introduces his Irish Church Bill.—Provisions of the Measure.—Debate on the Second Reading.—Powerful Speech by Mr. Bright.—Eloquent Peroration.—Great Majority for the Bill.—Debate on the Condition of Ireland.—Passage of Arms between Lord Claud Hamilton and Mr. Bright.—The Church Bill passes the Commons.—Mr. Bright on the House of Lords.—Great Debate in the Upper House on the Government Measure.—Majority for Disestablishment.—Mr. Bright at Birmingham in January 1870.—The Irish Land Question.—National Education.—Reciprocity.—Free Land.—Mr. Bright and the Land Bill of 1870.—Provisions of the Measure.—The ‘Purchase Clauses’ of the Act.—Mr. Bright’s Plans for Land Reform.—His Irish Addresses.



BEING thus supported by the country in the great work to which he had put his hand, on the 1st of March, 1869, Mr. Gladstone introduced his bill ‘to put an end to the Established Church in Ireland, to make provision in respect of the temporalities thereof, and of the Royal College of Maynooth.’ The House of Commons was densely crowded in every part by those eager to listen to the Premier’s exposition. He described the object of the Ministerial plan to be final legislation, so that all controversy between rival religionists should be at once put aside. To allow time for necessary arrangements, the Act would not take effect until the 1st of January, 1871. A Commission would be appointed for ten years, in which the entire property of the Irish Church would be vested, subject to life interests. Titles would terminate when the provisional period was at an end; but with respect to bishops, all peerages were to lapse immediately. The College of Maynooth would be placed on a footing precisely

analogous to that of the Established Church—viz., a valuation of the annual grants at fourteen years' purchase. The gross value of the Irish Church property Mr. Gladstone estimated at £16,000,000. From this sum fell to be deducted the life interests of incumbents of all kinds, which would amount to £4,900,000; compensation to curates, £800,000; other compensations, £900,000; and Maynooth engagements, £1,100,000. Mr. Gladstone proposed with the large surplus to make provision for the blind, deaf, and dumb, and other charities and lunatic asylums, for the relief (as expressed in the bill) of unavoidable calamity or suffering, but not so as to cancel the obligation of property for the relief of the poor.

The Premier, in an eloquent passage, called upon the House to complete the great work of peace and justice. His speech occupied rather more than three hours in its delivery, and it was the universal opinion that a more masterly or luminous statement—considering the greatness of the scheme and its complicated nature—had never been made in Parliament.

The second reading was fixed for the 18th of March, and on that date Mr. Disraeli vigorously opposed the bill, which he regarded as justifying acts of spoliation and confiscation against private as well as public property. Other able speeches against the bill were made by Dr. Ball, Sir Stafford Northcote, Mr. Spencer Walpole, and Mr. Gathorne Hardy. The Attorney-General for Ireland, Mr. Sullivan, Mr. Lowe, Mr. Bright, and Mr. Gladstone all supported the measure; and the debating power on both sides was regarded as worthy of the House of Commons in any past time.

It was generally admitted, however, that the finest oratorical effort in the course of the debate was Mr. Bright's. He rose on the second night, and his speech all through was remarkable for its great power and earnestness. He observed in the outset that the question which the House had to decide upon was this—whether the Protestant Established Church in Ireland should cease to exist as a State institution. The matter at issue was not whether all establishments were good, but whether an Establishment was good for Ireland. The question had been brought to this point by the existence of a great Irish question and a great ecclesiastical

grievance. He called Lord Stanley as a witness to this. There were few men in the House better informed than the noble lord; there was no one more calm and impartial in his judgment; no speaker more measured and careful in his language; yet at a political banquet at Bristol he spoke of 'the painful, the dangerous, and to us, in appearance at least, the discreditable state of things which continues to exist in Ireland.' The noble lord concluded with the emphatic declaration, 'Ireland is the question of the hour.' He (the speaker) was not sure that since Belshazzar's feast there had been any announcement more startling, more solemn, or more calculated to disturb the merriment of a great and joyous banquet. Lord Mayo, too, had admitted that there was an ecclesiastical grievance in Ireland. The late Government being totally unable to grapple with this question—as he proved from the utterances of its various members—Mr. Gladstone had been called in to settle it. Mr. Bright remarked that the settlement now before the House had met with the sympathy and support of the great bulk of the British people. To the question asked from the other side, What is Protestant ascendancy? he replied by describing the Irish Church as a Church of conquest—the most flagrant violation of the Protestant Reformation in Europe—which had only been maintained by British power, and against which the Irish people had never ceased to protest.

Answering Mr. Disraeli's contention that the Establishment was a protector of freedom of religion and toleration, Mr. Bright excited the House to cheers and laughter by remarking that Mr. Disraeli seemed to read a different history from anybody else, or that he made his own history, and, like Voltaire, made it better without facts than with them. Regarded in every light, the Establishment had failed completely. It had made Ireland not only the most Catholic, but the most Roman of countries, and it had made Catholicism not only a religion, but a patriotism, for which multitudes of Irishmen were ready to die; and as to binding England and Ireland together, it had done that as soldiers and police had done it, and no more. The bill was put forward by the Government as the means of creating a real and solid union, and of removing Irish discontent, not only in Ireland, but across the Atlantic. Already

the Irish in Australia and America were watching the proceedings of Parliament with intense interest; and though emigration would continue, the Irish would leave us no longer as enemies. The complaint which Lord North made so long ago as the first American war would at length be put an end to. By way of encouragement to the disestablished Irish Church, Mr. Bright referred to what had been accomplished since 1843 by the Free Church of Scotland, which had gone out of the Establishment absolutely naked—‘not a church left them, nor a glebe house, nor a curtilage, nor a commutation, nor, I will be bound to say, with a single good wish, or, a “God bless you!” on that side of the House.’ Yet they had built 900 churches, 650 manse, 500 schools, three theological colleges, and two training institutions. ‘Yet the learned member for the University of Dublin (Dr. Ball) had the courage to say, in the presence of many members of the Nonconformist body, that the ministers of the voluntary churches are rather of a low class—that they are not high-born. As to being high-born, I think the prophets of old were many of them graziers. The apostles were fishermen and handicraftsmen. It was a religion, as we are told, to which “not many noble and not many mighty were called.” It may be that in this age and in this country the light of the Reformation and of Christianity may be carried through the land by men of humble birth with just as much success as may attend men who were born in great mansions or palaces.’

Mr. Bright asked whether there was any reason why the Scotchmen in the north of Ireland, the Presbyterians, should be less liberal or energetic than their countrymen of the Free Church in Scotland; and he concluded with this glowing peroration:—

‘It is too late to-night to go into the question of the surplus. There is one thing that I should say about it—and I say it in the hearing of my hon. and learned friend (Sir Roundell Palmer), who is understood to take a different view on this question from some on this side. John Wycliffe, as the House knows, lived five hundred years ago; he was born in the town of Richmond; and he was, perhaps, the first and greatest of the English Reformers. John Wycliffe was obliged to consider this question as to what should be done with regard to religious endowments; and he said, “If Churches make bad use of their endowments, princes are bound to take them away from them.” It is not too much for us to say that if endowments are

found to be mischievous, Parliament may put them to other uses. I sometimes wonder how it is that in five hundred years we make so little progress on some subjects. That was the opinion of Wycliffe in the fourteenth century, and we are now discussing the same subject in this House; and right hon. and hon. and learned gentlemen get up in this House and denounce as almost sacrilege and spoliation any attempt on the part of the Imperial Parliament to deal with the endowments of the State Church in Ireland. And as to the uses to which these endowments are put, if I were particular on the point as to the sacred nature of the endowments, I should even then be satisfied with the propositions in this bill—for, after all, I hope it is not far from Christianity to charity; and we know that the Divine Founder of our faith has left much more of the doings of a compassionate and loving heart than He has of dogma. (Hear, hear.) I am not able to give the chapter or the verse, the page or the column; but what has always struck me most in reading the narratives of the Gospel is how much of kindness and how much of compassion there was, and how much also there was of dealing kindly with all that were sick, all that were suffering. Do you think it will be a misappropriation of the surplus funds of this great Establishment to apply them to some objects such as those described in the bill? Do you not think that from the charitable dealing with these matters even a sweeter incense may arise than when these vast funds are applied to maintain three times the number of clergy with which they are connected? (Hear, hear.) We can do little, it is true. We cannot relume the extinguished lamp of reason. We cannot make the deaf to hear. We cannot make the dumb to speak. It is not given to us

“ From the thick film to purge the visual ray,
And on the sightless eyeballs pour the day ; ”

but at least we can lessen the load of affliction, and we can make life more tolerable to vast numbers who suffer. (Loud cheers.) Sir, when I look at this great measure—and I can assure the House I have looked at it much more than the majority of hon. and right hon. members opposite, because I have seen it grow from line to line, and from clause to clause, and have watched its growth and its completion with a great and increasing interest,—I say when I look at this measure I look on it as tending to a more true and solid union between Ireland and Great Britain; I see it giving tranquillity to our people—(“ Oh, oh,” from the Opposition, followed by Ministerial cheers)—when you have a better remedy I at least will fairly consider it—(cheers),—I say I see this measure giving tranquillity to our people, greater strength to the realm, and adding a new lustre and a new dignity to the Crown. (Hear, hear.) I dare claim for this bill the support of all thoughtful and good people within the bounds of the British Empire, and I cannot doubt that in its early and great results it will have the blessing of the Supreme; for I believe it to be founded on those principles of justice and mercy which are the glorious attributes of His eternal reign.’ (Loud cheers.)

This noble conclusion to a speech peculiarly distinguished for its moral fervour and earnestness greatly moved the House, and when Mr. Bright sat down the cheering was renewed again and again.

The applause came from both sides of the House. The peroration was such an one as was rarely, if ever, heard within the walls of the House of Commons before; but delivered in sonorous and thrilling tones, and with due solemnity, the speaker succeeded in the great achievement of the orator, namely, that of swaying others so completely as to permeate them for a time with his own feelings and emotions.

The division took place amid much excitement. The numbers were—For the second reading, 368; against, 250; majority, 118. The majority was somewhat larger than had been anticipated. It will be seen that, including tellers, no fewer than 622 members voted in this division. The House of Commons now adjourned for a few days for the Easter recess.

After the reassembling of the House, and during the progress of the Irish Church Bill through Committee, a debate on the general condition of Ireland was initiated by Mr. S. R. Graves, one of the members for Liverpool. In the course of this discussion, which took place on the 30th of April, Lord Claud Hamilton charged the President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Bright) with countenancing Fenianism, by a letter written in 1866, by attending one of their demonstrations in Dublin, by jesting at the scheme to surprise Chester Castle, and by sympathy with Barrett, condemned for his share in the Clerkenwell explosion. Mr. W. M. Torrens rose to order during the noble lord's speech, and was himself called to order by Mr. Disraeli; but upon the Chair being appealed to, the Speaker said that although no definite expression had been made use of which he could officially notice, he had watched, not without a feeling of pain and regret, the course of the speech of the noble lord.

As Mr. Torrens remarked, however, Mr. Bright was well able to take care of himself, and Lord Claud Hamilton's speech led to a spirited and crushing reply from the right hon. gentleman. Mr. Bright began by reminding his antagonist that the Irish question was a great question before either of them was born into the world. He called both the House and the noble lord to witness that from the first moment when he (Mr. Bright) felt called upon to speak on the Irish question, either in or out of Parliament, he described the

maladies of Ireland in the same language, and called on Parliament to apply the same remedies. What he said before, he said now, that there could be no peace in the country, and no settlement, until the population were put in possession in greater numbers of the soil of their own country. They all wished for the suppression of agrarian crime in Ireland, but throughout considerable districts there was a state of opinion so depraved, or so hostile to the law, or so regardless of human life, that all the powers of the Government were baffled in endeavouring to grapple with the sore evil which afflicted the country. What was to be done? It was not a case for panic. They must ask themselves why there was in Ireland a state of things so different from any which existed elsewhere.

Recalling the language of the appeal which, as we have seen, Mr. Bright addressed to Mr. Disraeli and Mr. Gladstone in 1866, begging them to address themselves to this momentous Irish question, the speaker went on to observe that he adhered to the main argument of the letter complained of. 'I say that the condition of things in Ireland which has existed for the last two hundred years, for the last one hundred years, or even for the last fifty years, would have been utterly impossible if Ireland had been removed from the shelter and the influence and the power of Great Britain. I repeat that if Ireland were unmoored from her fastenings in the deep, and floated two thousand miles to the westward, those things which we propose to do,—which we offer to the House in this session, and which, in all probability, may be offered to the House in the next session,—would have been done by the people of Ireland themselves; and that if they had become a State of the American Republic under the constitution of that country, those things would have been done. As to the charge of his sympathy with Barrett, Mr. Bright said that he had been asked to interpose because some persons believed that the wrong man had been convicted, and as he was against capital punishment, whether for Fenianism or any other offence, he had a double reason for making an appeal to the Home Secretary. With regard to the real question of the evening, there was a case that should induce every man on both sides of the House to apply a remedy to the great grievance of the land. The time

had come when acts of constant repression in Ireland were unjust and evil, and no more acts of repression ought ever to pass the House unless attended by acts of a remedial and consoling nature.

Such, once more, was the sympathetic language of a true and tried friend of Ireland. Mr. Bright added that if his voice could reach any man in any Ribbon lodge, he would tell him that no man was a greater enemy to his country than he. For the only time in the history of the union between Great Britain and Ireland, there was a Parliament willing to do justice to Ireland—both with regard to the Church and the land question. They who lived twenty years to come, and looked back to the Irish policy of the present Government, would say they acted not only according to their light, and with the most honest intention, but with a wisdom which all that had succeeded demonstrated to be political wisdom of a high order in connection with this question.

After many lengthy discussions, the Irish Church Bill passed through Committee in the Lower House on the 7th of May—a morning sitting, protracted from two till seven o'clock, being taken for that purpose. The same evening, in the House of Lords, the Marquis of Salisbury questioned the Government as to the sense in which Mr. Bright's recent declaration on the Irish land question was to be received. Earl Granville, in reply, said Mr. Bright himself had told him, 'I made the mistake of not prefacing what I had to say by stating that, if I were left to myself, I should do so and so.' The explanation of Mr. Bright's language, added the noble Earl, was to be found in his habits as a popular speaker free from official restraint.

While frequent meetings, for and against the Government policy, were being held in the country, the Irish Church Bill was read a third time, and passed by the House of Commons on the 31st of May. On the 14th of June the debate on the second reading commenced in the House of Lords.

Just at this time, however, considerable excitement was created by the publication of the following letter, addressed by Mr. Bright to Mr. H. B. S. Thompson, Secretary to the Birmingham Liberal Association :—

'DEAR SIR,—I must ask my friends to excuse me if I am unable to accept their invitation for the meeting on Monday next. The Lords are not very wise, but there is sometimes profit to the people even in their innovations. If they should delay the passing of the Irish Church Bill for three months, they will stimulate discussion on important questions, which, but for their infatuation, might have slumbered for many years. It is possible that a good many people may ask what is the special value of a constitution which gives a majority of 100 in one House for a given policy, and a majority of 100 in another House against it. I may be asked also why the Crown, through its Ministers in the House of Commons, should be found in harmony with the nation, while the Lords are generally in direct opposition to it. Instead of doing a little childish tinkering about life peerages, it would be well if the Peers could bring themselves on a line with the opinions and necessities of our day. In harmony with the nation, they may go on for a long time; but, throwing themselves athwart its course, they may meet with accidents not pleasant for them to think of. But there are not a few good and wise men among the Peers, and we will hope their counsels may prevail. I am sure you will forgive me if I cannot come to your meeting.

'Believe me always very truly yours,

'JOHN BRIGHT.'

Ministers were questioned in both Houses of Parliament respecting this letter. Earl Granville in the Lords, and Mr. Gladstone in the Commons, while disclaiming any official knowledge of the contents of the document, said they were compelled to declare that it was not more severe than the language which had been applied to the bill and its promoters. Mr. Gladstone added that both himself and Mr. Bright had declined to attend public meetings on the subject of the Irish Church, not being desirous of taking any extra-parliamentary part in the agitation upon this question. We may add that the terms of Mr. Bright's letter were most moderate in comparison with the abuse showered upon the Premier at this juncture.

On the 18th of June, after a remarkable display of eloquence on both sides, the second reading of the Irish Church Bill was carried in the House of Lords by a majority of 33. The numbers were—For the bill, 179; against, 146. The division was the largest taken in the House of Lords within living memory—325 peers having personally recorded their votes, while eighteen paired. Many eminent Conservative peers, being desirous of settling the question, supported the Government. During the subsequent progress of the bill through Committee, many important amendments were made. Some of these were accepted by the Commons, and a compromise

being finally arranged with regard to others, the bill passed, and received the royal assent by commission on the 26th of July.

The members for Birmingham addressed their constituents on the 11th of January, 1870, and Mr. Bright's speech was again mainly devoted to Ireland. The occasion was one of much public interest, as it was believed that Mr. Bright would indicate the nature of the Government policy on the land question. The right hon. gentleman began with some references to the past session. One great local measure, and one great measure of imperial importance, had been passed. By the former the large body of the ratepayers of Birmingham had been relieved from a grievance which had arisen by the abolition of the system of compounding for rates. The question of imperial importance was that of the Irish Church. The Peers had shown a great deal of wisdom in passing this Act, and had taught some people the lesson that no institution, however ancient, however dignified, however grand in its historical character, could be safe in this country if it permanently set itself against the convictions and the voice of a united people. Now that the Irish Church was disestablished, there was no Catholic grievance left, though there might be Irish grievances. There was yet one very important and awkward question, and that was the land question. But it was not an impossible problem. The land of Ireland was in the hands of very few proprietors; and the industry, the fortunes, the home, the very life of the cultivating population, were at the mercy of the owner of the land, or of the agent who had the management of his property. But there was something else: the owners were not of the same nation as the occupiers. The original grievance had been made ten times more bitter than it would otherwise have been by the folly of the proprietary class, working as they did through a corrupt Parliament in Ireland, and also through the governing power in Great Britain.

At last, continued Mr. Bright, Parliament was called on, not merely to give right and justice to the tenants, but to save the interests and protect the property of the proprietors. He did not know whether, if he were an Irishman, he should be more anxious for legislation as a tenant or as a landlord. But it was absolutely

necessary to put an end to the reign of discord in Ireland. The land question was one of the greatest and most difficult that had ever been considered by an Administration or submitted to Parliament. But it was not a question for class and party conflict—'it was one for conscientious patriotism, a question which every man should consider, because the prosperity, the peace, and the unity of the empire depended upon its wise solution.' He believed now that great results were about to follow from legislation for Ireland.

'What has been done already? In conjunction with her representatives we have already given to Ireland free churches and free schools, and I hope before long that we shall give them free land and a free vote. Ireland, as you know, is not the most wealthy island in the world, but we can buy from her all she wishes to sell at a higher price than any other nation can give, and we can sell to her all she wishes to buy at a lower price than any other nation. We may fail, but I believe that we shall not fail. (Cheers.) Good and honest efforts generally succeed. We propose, then, a new conquest of Ireland, without confiscation and without blood—with only the holy weapon of a frank and a generous justice, which is everywhere potent to bring together nations which have been long alienated by oppression or neglect. (Loud cheers.) From such a new policy we hope for great changes in Ireland. We do not expect that Ireland is to be made a paradise, but that it will be greatly altered for the better. It may seem like the language of exaggeration when I quote the lines of Pope in one of the most exquisite poems in our language :

" Then crime shall cease, and ancient fraud shall fail,
Returning Justice lift aloft her scale ;
Peace o'er the realm her olive wand extend,
And white-robed Innocence from Heaven descend."

(Loud cheers.) I say that this may appear like the language of exaggeration ; but if we are able to suppress conspiracy, if we are able to banish agrarian crime—(cheers)—if we can unbar the prison doors—(cheers)—if we can reduce all excess of military force, if we can make Ireland as tranquil as England and Scotland now are—(cheers)—then, at least, I think we may have done something to justify the wisdom and the statesmanship of our time.' (Loud cheers.)

Dealing next with the question of education, with regard to which Birmingham had recently taken its right position and done itself so much honour, Mr. Bright said he was glad to think that the religious difficulty was diminishing in magnitude. Every child in every school might be taught the elementary parts of religion ; and the denominational system had acquired strength because it endeavoured to do that which everybody saw must necessarily be done.

He was persuaded that as this topic was more fully discussed there would come up a demand for national education from all the people, and then the religious question would gradually become smaller and smaller, while they would be able to offer to all the children of the country a sound elementary education.

Turning then to the subject of the commercial treaty with France, Mr. Bright warned his hearers against the new 'reciprocity' movement, which was merely Protection under another name. He advised working men not to be deceived by interested agitators, and recommended them to press for such retrenchment in taxation as would not only give to all who heard him a free breakfast-table, but free trade in land as well. This question of free land, he said, in conclusion, was coming on, and was inevitable :—

'I believe that an alteration of the land laws of England, such as might be made without lessening by sixpence the value of any man's property, would do much to arrest that tide of pauperism which is constantly flowing from the agricultural counties into our great centres of industry. But when I have mentioned these things, I am obliged to confess that they are not all—that something more is wanted, although the law will not effect it, and although its foundation lies beyond the bounds of law. It is that which every man should consider : I have considered it often and often, with great seriousness and with much anxiety, during the thirty years that I have been in the habit of discussing public questions. No Government, no Administration, no laws, no amount of industry or commerce, no extent of freedom, can give prosperity and solid comfort to the homes of the people unless there be in those homes economy, temperance, and the practice of virtue. That which I am preaching is needful for all, but it is specially needful—most needful in some respects—for those whose possessions are the least abundant and the least secure. If we could subtract from the ignorance, the poverty, the suffering, the sickness, and the crime which are caused by one single but most prevalent bad habit or vice—the drinking heedlessly of that which destroys body and mind, and home and family—do we not all feel that this country would be so changed, and so changed for the better, that it would be almost impossible for us to know it again? Let me then, in conclusion, say what is upon my heart to say, what I know to be true, what I have felt every hour of my life when I have been discussing anything which affects the condition of the working classes. It is by the union of a wise Government with a virtuous people, and not otherwise, that we may hope to make some steps towards that blessed time when there shall be no longer complaining in our streets, when our garners shall be full, affording all manner of store.'

At a public breakfast given to him on the day following the delivery of this speech, Mr. Bright discussed the question of working-men candidates, and said he did not approve of such

candidates as representatives of the working classes only. He approved of good men of any class being returned to Parliament, if they were capable of representing all classes; but he wished the idea of classes to be got rid of, and desired rather national representation. This expression of opinion led to a controversy with the supporters of Mr. George Odger, who was then contesting the borough of Southwark.

In the debates on Mr. Gladstone's Irish Land Bill of 1870—a further scheme for the pacification of Ireland in which he had taken a deep and special interest—Mr. Bright was able to take no part. On the very eve of the meeting of Parliament, finding he was suffering greatly from mental exhaustion, the right hon. gentleman wrote as follows to Mr. Gladstone: 'I cannot tell you how much I am disappointed at being absent from the meeting of Parliament, but I have distinct warnings of an attack of something like that from which I suffered fourteen years ago, and I dare not disregard them. I am quite unable to work, and must leave London for a time. I regret deeply that I cannot be at your side to vote and plead for the Irish Land Bill. I think it a wise, just, and comprehensive measure; and I hope the moderation and patriotism of Parliament will enable it soon to become law.'

The Land Bill was introduced by Mr. Gladstone on the 15th of February. In a speech of three hours' duration he minutely discussed the several questions of loans to occupiers and landlords, the judicial machinery for administering the Act, the different classes of holdings, damages for eviction, improvements, and leases. The question, 'What is an improvement?' had given the Government much trouble, and the definition the author of the bill gave was that it must be something which should add to the letting value of the land, and must be suitable to the holding. The bill would reverse the present presumption of law, and would presume all improvements to be the property of the tenant, and it would be for the landlord to prove the contrary. Retrospective improvements would be included, but only so far back as twenty years, except in the case of permanent buildings and reclamations of lands. As to holdings under lease, the Premier said any owner

might exempt his lands from the custom, always excepting the Ulster custom, which would be legalised, and from the scale of damages, by giving to his tenants a lease for thirty-one years, provided that the lease were approved by the Court, and gave the tenant at the close of it a right to compensation for manures, permanent buildings, and reclamation of land. The bill, after lengthy discussions, passed through both Houses—several amendments by the Lords being accepted by the Commons; and it received the royal assent on the 1st of August.

With regard to this important measure, it may be stated that the 'Purchase clauses' of the Act were, as is well known, proposed by Mr. Bright, and urged by him upon the Cabinet. They met with little earnest support, however, and, it is believed, in one quarter with strong opposition. The Irish Executive had their scheme in the bill which became law, and the Cabinet were disposed to be content with their suggestions; and the utmost which was accepted from Mr. Bright were the incomplete clauses whose operation has been so partial and limited.

The plan then proposed by Mr. Bright was mainly that adopted in the later bill of the session of 1881. As we have remarked, shortly before the commencement of the session of 1870 Mr. Bright was in failing health, and was compelled to absent himself from Parliament before the bill was brought forward. He was consequently unable to insist upon and defend his clauses, as he might, and doubtless would, under other circumstances have ably and effectively done. Mr. Gladstone is understood to have regarded the plan with favour, but opinion seemed not to have ripened sufficiently to enable the Government to deal more boldly with the question. It is the opinion of many well-informed persons in Ireland that if the plan accepted in 1881 with almost unanimous consent had been adopted in the bill of 1870, the country might have been spared the suffering and the danger of the agitation through which Ireland has passed since Mr. Gladstone's first Land Bill became law.

The Irish addresses delivered by Mr. Bright during the period we have just traced—that is, from 1866 to 1870—demonstrate not

only his love of justice, and his deep desire to secure a righteous treatment for Ireland, but a capacity for a high order of statesmanship. In a very large degree, as we have before observed, it was his advocacy that hastened those great remedial measures passed for the benefit of Ireland and the Irish people which shed such lustre upon Mr. Gladstone's first Administration.

CHAPTER XXVI.

*THE ELECTION OF 1868.—MR. BRIGHT ACCEPTS OFFICE.—
SECOND ILLNESS AND RESIGNATION, ETC.*

The General Election of 1868.—Mr. Bright's Address to his Constituents. His Speech in the Town Hall.—Contrast between Toryism and Liberalism.—Mr. Bright on the Minority Clause.—Address to the Gunmakers.—The enormous Public Expenditure.—Policy and Opinions of the Tory Candidates.—National Education.—Scene at the Birmingham Nomination.—Result of the Poll.—Great Liberal Triumph.—Liberal Victory throughout the Country.—Resignation of Mr. Disraeli.—Mr. Gladstone becomes Prime Minister.—He offers a Seat in the Cabinet to Mr. Bright.—It is ultimately accepted.—The Gladstone Ministry.—Mr. Bright's Re-election.—Address to his Constituents.—Remarks on his Acceptance of Office.—President of the Board of Trade.—Mr. Bright on Nova Scotia and the Confederation Scheme.—On Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister.—Sir T. Chambers's Bill of 1869.—Banquet at the Trinity House.—Speech by Mr. Bright.—Amnesty to the Fenian Prisoners in 1870.—Mr. Bright's Second Illness.—He resigns Office.—The Press on the Resignation.—Mr. Bright condemns Home Rule.—Congratulatory Address from the Workmen of London.—Mr. Bright on Republicanism.—Presentation from the Potteries.—Review of Public Questions.—Reconstruction of Mr. Gladstone's Cabinet.—Mr. Bright accepts office as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.—Great Meeting at Birmingham.—Stirring Scene.—Important Speech by Mr. Bright.—Free Land.—The waning Popularity of the Government.—Mr. Gladstone's Manifesto to the Electors of Greenwich.—Dissolution of Parliament.—The Election for Birmingham.—The old Members returned.—Speech by Mr. Bright.—Results of the General Election.—Mr. Disraeli accedes to office as Premier.



AFTER Mr. Disraeli's emphatic defeat on Mr. Gladstone's Irish Church Resolutions in the session of 1868, the Premier resolved on appealing to the country. The elections, however, which were the first held under the new Reform Act, did not take place until the following November.

But immediately after the prorogation of Parliament on the 31st

of July, preparations were made in many of the constituencies in view of the approaching contest. The struggle had a double significance. Mr. Disraeli was naturally anxious that the constituencies, which had been enlarged by the Act of 1867, should pronounce in favour of his Government; while the Liberal party throughout the country was equally anxious for a striking and unmistakable endorsement of Mr. Gladstone's Irish Church policy.

Mr. Bright issued his address to his constituents at Birmingham on the 22nd of August. On the subject of the ballot he remarked: 'I regard the question of the ballot as of first importance. Whether I look to the excessive cost of elections, or to the tumult which so often attends them, or to the unjust and cruel pressure which is so frequently brought to bear upon the less independent class of voters, I am persuaded that the true interest of the public and of freedom will be served by the adoption of the system of secret and free voting. It is in practice, and is highly valued, in almost every other country having representative institutions; and I regard it as absolutely necessary to a real representation of the United Kingdom.' Upon the great topic of the hour he observed: 'The foremost question for the new Parliament will be our treatment of Ireland. You know my views on the Irish Church Establishment and on the land question. In dealing with the Irish Establishment we are not promoting the spread of the Roman Catholic, or damaging the influence of the Protestant religion. We do not touch religion at all. We deal only with the political institution, which has wholly failed to secure any good object, and which has succeeded only in weakening the loyalty and offending the sense of justice of the great majority of the Irish people. Our opponents speak of their zeal for Protestantism and their loyalty to the constitution. I prefer Protestantism which is in alliance with Christian kindness and with justice, and my loyalty to the constitution leads me to wish for the hearty union of the three kingdoms in allegiance to the Crown. I believe that Christianity and the constitution will be alike strengthened in these islands by the removal of the Irish Church Establishment.'

By the Reform Act, Birmingham was one of those towns to

which a third member was given; and the Liberals, being resolved, if possible, upon defeating the minority clause, now brought forward three candidates, namely, Mr. Bright and Mr. George Dixon, the old members, and Mr. P. H. Muntz. They were opposed by two Conservatives, Mr. Sampson Lloyd and Dr. Sebastian Evans, who knowing the extremely Liberal character of the Birmingham constituency, endeavoured to infuse into their Conservatism as popular a tone as possible.

On the 26th of October, Mr. Bright appeared before a crowded meeting of the electors, held in the Town Hall, Mr. J. S. Wright presiding. The hon. gentleman spoke for more than an hour, but the *Birmingham Post* observed that 'the more than usual earnestness and rapidity of speech with which he commenced his discourse led to the inevitable discomfiture of his voice, which, under the strain it was thus subjected to, betrayed its inherent weakness long before the close of his address.' Although to all appearances in good health, the change which the past few months had effected in his appearance was strikingly evident to all. Time had marked his long years of service with an unsparing hand; and his hair, which when he last stood in the Town Hall was of an iron-grey, had now turned to silver.

Mr. Bright's speech on this occasion consisted of a retrospect, a contrast, and an appeal. He reminded his listeners that exactly ten years had elapsed since he was entitled to address the electors of Birmingham as one of their representatives. Since that time, he said, referring to the subject of reform, they had done much to dethrone a class and to raise a nation to power. In 1858 there were seven thousand electors in all the vast population of Birmingham; but in the election impending no fewer than forty thousand might vote. 'At this moment,' he continued, 'there are two parties, and there are two systems of government, and of administration, and of legislation, who are appealing to you for your suffrage—one which in our younger days always called itself the Tory party, but latterly, with an ingenuity that would almost baffle a detective—(laughter and cheers)—has taken several other names. Sometimes it calls itself Conservative; and I am told that in Birmingham even that is

refined down to Liberal-Conservatism—(laughter)—and in some other places, and perhaps here on some occasions, it calls itself Constitutionalism. (Great laughter). The great constitutional measure which has just been passed was a measure of our recommendation—(cheers)—and the measure that we have carried; and the measure that was not only not carried, but was not originated, and was always opposed, by those who now triumphantly appeal to you under the character of friends of the constitution. The other party calls itself Liberal; and with many shortcomings, and with many errors in its history, it has been, and may be now, truly called the Liberal party.' (Cheers.)

The hon. gentleman went on to say that in ancient times, when any great public emergency arose, it was common for the people to consult the oracles; and he should like his hearers to consult the past and recent history of this country to discover the true character of the two parties who were appealing to them. Suppose they were then engaged in the election going forward in the United States, would they support a man who had never stepped forward to uphold the hand of President Lincoln in his determination to maintain the unity of a great nation, and to abolish slavery? What was reasonable then in England? He would ask them about the past—not the remote past—because from 1760 to 1828 was a period of utter political darkness in this country. But in 1828 no Dissenter in England could hold any civil or military office in the State. Many did hold these offices contrary to law, but every year a bill of indemnity was passed to excuse them for having broken the law. There were six millions of Roman Catholics in the kingdom, and not one of them was permitted to sit in the House of Commons. Where did the members of Parliament come from? He had lately been spending some days in the county of Cornwall, with beautiful coast scenery, and with an industrious, a frugal, an intelligent, and a noble-minded population; but the rotten boroughs of that county formerly returned forty-four members.

At the time of which he was speaking, too, of municipal government there was scarcely anything in England, while in the colonies we had 800,000 negroes in a state apparently of hopeless bondage.

Then there were monopolies in corn, sugar, and many other things. In canvassing a working man, he had told him that since the repeal of the Corn Laws there had come into this country more than five hundred millions' worth of food which those laws were intended to keep out. A loaf had been given where otherwise it could not have been given, and there was not an agricultural labourer in England whose wages had not been increased, whose comforts had not been made more secure, by the abolition of the law which was supposed to give special protection to their interest. Then there was the abolition of the tax upon the newspaper press, respecting which great change his old friend Mr. Milner Gibson, of all men, deserved the honour and the credit; and this change could not be reckoned second to any. England had undergone a revolution in the past forty years. How were those changes made, and who made them? Public opinion had never been created, or stimulated, or guided—it had sometimes been obeyed—by the Tory party.

After referring to the French Treaty, slavery emancipation, the repeal of the paper duty, reform, and the disestablishment of the Irish Church—as matters all supported by the Liberal party, Mr. Bright thus concluded his stirring address :—

‘ We must have done with everything that is intended solely to please and to elevate one class as against another class. (Hear, hear.) We must be as one people, and we must have one law, and one measure of justice, and one great equality in all our institutions. (Cheers.) And if you intend to have this, you must give no more support to the Tory party—(cheers)—now, when you have votes, than you did by your voices when you had no votes. If it had not been for that party, your fathers and your grandfathers would have had a vote, which is only now conceded to you. (Hear, hear.) What would you think of the liberated negroes of the Southern States coming forward to vote for any of the members of the Copperhead faction—(laughter)—that would have kept him in perpetual bondage? Metaphorically, may I not say that your chains are but just dropping off? They now lie at your feet. (Applause.) Your limbs at this very moment are sore with their chafing. The sound of their clanking has not left your ears, and you are impudently and audaciously asked to vote for a man and a party who for a hundred years past have riveted those chains upon you. (Prolonged cheering.) Ten years ago I appealed to you from this place. I appealed to you on behalf of the franchise, which I said you had a right to, and which must be shortly conceded to you. I did not appeal in vain. (Hear, hear, and applause.) I reminded you then of what your fathers had done, not then thirty years

ago, when they had shaken the fabric of privilege to its base—I appeal to you now. Ever since I have been permitted to speak in these open councils of my countrymen I have pleaded for their rights—for their political rights. You have now, to a large extent, obtained those rights. I plead with you once more that you should regard those rights as a sacred trust—(cheers)—in the eyes of your countrymen, and in the eye of Heaven itself, and that you should use those rights only as an instrument of good—that you should seriously weigh the claims of all those who seek your suffrages, and that you should so vote that you may expect to influence in the Imperial Parliament the legislation of your country, so that you may advance the happiness of all the people in all its families, and the grandeur and the security of this nation. (Loud applause.)’

On the 30th, Mr. Bright delivered another stirring speech to an enthusiastic audience which crowded the Town Hall in every part. He spoke with more action and vigour than on the previous occasion. The subject of the minority clause roused the hon. member’s eloquence to its highest pitch, and, apart from its other merits, the whole address was a fine piece of oratorical display. Mr. Jaffray moved the following resolution: ‘That with the view of defeating the operation of the minority clause, and of rendering certain the return of the three Liberal candidates, Messrs. Bright, Dixon, and Muntz, this meeting is of opinion that the plan of voting proposed by the Liberal Association should receive the unanimous support of the Liberal electors.’ By this plan, which originated with a well-known Birmingham Liberal, Mr. Harris, the borough was mapped out into various districts, and the electors in each district were told which candidates they were to vote for, with the view of ensuring the safe return of the whole three. The resolution was seconded by the Rev. Charles Vince, and carried without a single dissident.

Mr. Bright then addressed the meeting. Referring first to the Reform Act of the previous session, he showed that out of sixty-one clauses left in it when the bill passed, there were only four complete and perfect clauses as the Government offered them to the House. Sixteen clauses were borrowed from Mr. Gladstone’s bill of 1866. He then referred at length to the ratepaying clauses of the Act, which had caused so much suffering and irritation in Birmingham. The Government were responsible for what had taken place in this matter. Without the abolition of compound-

ing, in the then attitude of the Government, one of two things must have happened—either the bill must have been wholly lost for the session, or the great bulk of the householders, below £10—476,000 of them—must have remained without enfranchisement. He (Mr. Bright) had done all he could to inform public opinion on this question, and when any rational and just remedy was proposed to the House of Commons he hoped to be there to support it.

Passing then to consider the operation of the minority clause, Mr. Bright observed that the right of the electors at the nomination to hold up their hands for their candidates remained as it was before the Act passed. Now when a poll was demanded, it was granted to prove whether the show of hands did really express the opinions of the constituency. But how could the electors, being only allowed to vote for two candidates at the poll, correct or in any way prove the propriety and the truth of the demonstration at the hustings? Was it not quite clear that our ancient constitution was entirely departed from, and that the innovation which was passed last year was directly in the teeth of all the principles in this matter which had governed the electors for six hundred years past? If the principle were a good one, why not have it all over the constituencies? If they gave a seat to the minority in those places having only two seats, the borough was neutralised, and politically might just as well be extinct. Mr. Bright next demonstrated the fallacy of the cumulative vote as proposed by Mr. Lowe, showing that if a Tory candidate in Birmingham had only ten thousand supporters out of forty thousand, he might even come in at the head of the poll, if his supporters gave him all their three votes, and the Liberals distributed theirs amongst the various Liberal candidates. This was rejected, but the House of Lords, on the motion of Lord Cairns, introduced the odious clause now complained of, and the Government had carried it in the Commons by the united vote of the Conservatives, and some forty or fifty men from the Liberal side.

Their Conservative opponents, said Mr. Bright, were in favour of this clause, but if one of them by any possibility had a chance of

creeping in through it, he could only succeed by crippling and emasculating one of the greatest and one of the foremost of the constituencies in the empire. Every man now came to the election with one hand tied behind his back. Remarking that for himself he would not sit for any place where he had been returned by this detestable trick or wanton innovation, he thus closed his speech :—

‘Do not let us have any new-fangled ideas. The fancy franchises we kicked to the winds ; the minority clause, which ought to have come, not from the honest representatives of the people, but from Bedlam, or a region like that, should have the same treatment. (Cheers.) If you men of Birmingham want to know what freedom is, look back to the lives and histories of your forefathers. They knew how to lay foundations broad and deep ; it is for you to protect those foundations, and to build wisely upon them. (Cheers.) There is not one of the great fathers of English freedom who lived two centuries ago, who, if he had been in the House of Commons, would not have said “No” as emphatically as I did to this odious clause. (Cheers.) And now, seeing that in this hall, and in this constituency, we have no power to-night to put an end to this clause or to repeal it—seeing that it must be tolerated as it best may until the power that made it shall again unmake it, let us not forget that we have a duty in regard to it. Every Liberal throughout the United Kingdom is asking, “What is Birmingham going to do with the minority clause ?” If every part of the sea is salt, if every district and every ward of the constituency in Birmingham is Liberal, do you, by united action, by hand and voice, and heart and vote, tell the House of Commons and the whole country that there shall never go with your consent, in spite of all the machinations of these dreamers and schemers of minority representation, that no member or representative of the Tory party shall enter the House of Commons as the representative of this borough. (Loud cheers, and cries of “Never !”) And the more this is known throughout the country, the more this is felt in the House of Commons, the more certainly you may take this comfort to your hearts, that by this election—great and transcendent triumph as we believe it will be—you will put an end shortly to this odious infringement of your liberties, and add one other great and permanent security to English freedom.’

At the close of this peroration the vast auditory, whose applause had constantly broken forth during the hon. member’s speech, rose *en masse* to demonstrate their warm appreciation of the address.

Parliament was dissolved on the 11th of November, and writs were issued for a new one, returnable on the 11th of December. In Birmingham the Liberals had a great triumph, defeating the minority clause and returning all their candidates by large majorities. The clause was also defeated at Glasgow, but in Leeds and Manchester the Conservatives secured the third seat. The nomination at

Birmingham was fixed for the 16th of November, and for some days before this Mr. Bright and his colleagues were indefatigable in addressing meetings of the electors in various parts of the town.

On the 10th they addressed a meeting of the gun trade. This large and important trade had been harassed by the action of the Government in establishing manufactories at Enfield and elsewhere. In common with others, they condemned the policy of the Government in undertaking such commercial or industrial occupations as could only be carried out adequately and safely by private enterprise. Mr. Bright in his speech said that those who had convened the meeting had no intention whatever of urging upon their present or future representatives any course in regard to any particular trade or industry which should not be consistent with the true policy of Government and the true interests of all portions of the people. Had it been otherwise, he could be no advocate of such a trade or industry. The hon. gentleman went on to say that he had always been of opinion it was a great mistake for the Government to undertake the character of manufacturers; he believed it was so with regard to the building of ships, the manufacture of clothing for the army, and in the manufacturing of guns. He completely endorsed the opinion of his lamented friend Mr. Cobden, that the Government ought not to be allowed to manufacture for itself any article which could be obtained from private producers in a competitive market.

Mr. Bright then inveighed against the excessive public expenditure. Notwithstanding the enormous growth of the military expenditure, the services were always asking for more. The complaint against Oliver Twist was that he asked for more, but then Oliver was badly used, and this was not the case with those who were always working on the Government. An entirely new system was wanted. The formation of the Estimates should no longer be left to the Admiralty, the War Office, or the Cabinet; but there ought to be an honestly chosen committee of the House of Commons. For himself, he had done all he could to procure a reduction in the Estimates, but there was no greater delusion imaginable than that any single member of Parliament could make any sensible difference in the public expenditure. Mr. Joseph Hume fought the Estimates

for forty years, and yet they always grew. The £70,000,000 per annum for the past ten years had been drawn chiefly from the industrial portion of the population. The pressure of taxes was always felt most heavily by the poorest of the people. There was no jeopardy to a monarchy so great as that arising from a constantly growing debt and a constantly extravagant expenditure. Referring to the speeches of his opponents (Mr. Lloyd and Dr. Evans), Mr. Bright said, amid loud laughter, that he was too busy to dwell much upon works of fiction. The speeches of Mr. Lloyd were what he should call dull fiction, and the speeches of his colleague, though not less fiction, were certainly of a rather more sparkling and sensational character. He had not got much out of their speeches, for the reporters had given more prominence to the speech of their chairman, Mr. Councillor Lowe. Mr. Lowe said, 'Never go back from the bulwarks of your civil and religious liberties,' and that, he presumed, meant the Established Church of Ireland. He (Mr. Bright) did not believe that the Established Church was ever the bulwark of our civil or religious liberties either in England or Ireland, and it was a remarkable fact that the constant stream of perverts to the Church of Rome came, not from the Nonconformists, but from the Established Church. The Church of England was very far from being a bulwark against the Church of Rome.

As to the charge made against him that he was an opponent of the Factory Act, Mr. Bright replied that he went into the same lobby on this question with Lord Derby and Lord Chelmsford (then in the Commons), General Peel, Sir J. Pakington, and other leaders of the Conservative party. Perhaps he was in bad company, but certainly the supporters of those Conservative leaders ought now to admit that, if they had nothing since then to lay to his charge, his character would at least bear comparison with the eminent chiefs of their own party. As to short time, there was no man in England who had ever been more in favour of short time work than he had. His opponents were in a mean and pitiable condition. They were seeking to enter Parliament, not by the open door of the constitution of England, but to wriggle in by a crevice. Down in Birmingham they were Liberal-Conservatives, but on the way to Westminster

there would be an entire transformation, and at the House of Commons the Liberal-Conservative would be found sitting among the real old true-blue Tories. Referring to the approaching struggle, Mr. Bright said: 'Let me beg of you to consider the gravity of the occasion, the greatness of the principles for which we contend, the grandeur of the triumphs that we have already obtained, and the glories of the future to which your country may look forward; and let the man who speaks for Birmingham in the House of Commons be one who shall speak for those great principles which are essential in every country for the happiness of its whole people.'

In a second speech made in the Deritend Ward, Mr. Bright said he had read the inflated address of the Prime Minister (Mr. Disraeli); he had read scores of columns of talk by other gentlemen; but he had not found in any one paragraph any distinct proposition of any policy that was intended to change the condition of things in Ireland. He enforced the necessity for the ballot, reviewed briefly the political reforms recently achieved, and with regard to his opponents, Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Evans, remarked, amid cheers and laughter, that the utmost ambition of each was to become the inferior member for Birmingham. Mr. Bright concluded by defending Mr. Gladstone from the slanders and calumnies which just at this time were widely and persistently circulated against him; and he treated with contempt the aspersions which had been made upon himself.

Past progress, and the possibility of a free breakfast-table and other reforms, were the chief points of another speech made by the hon. gentleman at Saltley. In yet another speech, delivered at Holder's Concert Hall, Coleshill Street, Mr. Bright spoke upon the question of national education. He said he had long been the advocate of Parliamentary Reform, in order that a Parliament should be framed chiefly for this great purpose—that they might devise a policy which should lay hold of the vast mass of ignorance in the country, to raise the people many degrees in the social scale, and to remove that which was a discredit and a shame to our civilisation and to our religion. 'I am weary, as I travel through the country, of looking upon those vast borough gaols and county gaols—those vast fabrics that rise up, which, if you ask their names, are poor-

houses or lunatic asylums. I say that throughout the length and breadth of a great intelligent country like this, we ought to have buildings which shall strike the eye of every traveller through the country—of every foreigner who visits it; buildings which shall be consecrated to the greatest and the noblest of all purposes—that of instructing the great mass of the people, and raising them up to the position to which they have a right to aspire, and which God intends them to occupy.’ They were now fighting no mean battle. It was a battle of light as against darkness; it was a battle of justice against selfishness; it was a battle of instruction and intelligence against prejudice and against wrong.

The nomination took place on the 16th of November, the hustings being erected on a large space of ground behind the Town Hall. An immense crowd, computed at thirty thousand persons, was present. Mr. J. S. Wright, in coming forward to nominate Mr. Bright, said: ‘I have had entrusted to me the honourable duty of nominating our long-tried and faithful friend, John Bright, as a fit and proper person to represent this borough in the ensuing Parliament—a Parliament that will more completely represent you, the commons, the people of England, than any one that has assembled since the Norman Conquest—a Parliament formed by a power which mainly owes its force, if not its creation, to the genius and untiring energy of John Bright. His life is known, his acts are written on the imperishable record of our country’s history.’ Mr. Raffles seconded the nomination. Mr. George Dixon was proposed and seconded by Mr. Lampard and Mr. Jaffray respectively; Mr. P. H. Muntz by Ald. Ryland and Mr. Monk, a working man; Mr. S. S. Lloyd (the first Conservative candidate) by Mr. J. D. Goodman and Mr. Lowe; and Dr. Sebastian Evans by Mr. Hands and Mr. Bentley. Each candidate spoke very briefly, merely expressing his thanks.

Mr. Bright was received with one vast shout of applause from the whole assembly. While he was speaking, an enormous loaf was displayed from a distant window as an acknowledgment of his services in the cause of Free Trade. When Mr. Lloyd stood forward, a perfect storm of yells and groans arose on all sides. The large

loaf, which had been waved at the end of a stick when Mr. Bright spoke, was now exchanged for a loaf of the most diminutive proportions, and simultaneously a hoisted voter displayed a black flag, emblematic of the death of the hopes of the Conservative candidates. The show of hands was overwhelmingly in favour of the Liberal candidates, that for Mr. Bright surpassingly so; as a spectator remarked, the moving forest of hands seemed in effect as though a wind had passed over a field of corn, waving and whitening the vast surface.

A poll was demanded, which was ordered to be taken on the following day. The Conservatives sustained a crushing defeat, which was rendered all the worse in consequence of their having published a preliminary statement, to the effect that the result of their canvass gave a majority of 2273 for Mr. Lloyd over Mr. Bright. At the declaration of the poll, the Mayor read out the numbers as follows: Dixon, 15,098; Muntz, 14,614; Bright, 14,601; Lloyd, 8700; and Evans, 7061. A plan had been suggested by which Mr. Bright could have been returned at the head of the poll, but the hon. member himself would not allow the existing arrangement to be disturbed. He desired that the scheme laid down by the committee should be adhered to in its integrity. After the announcement of the figures, the three members and the defeated candidates briefly addressed the crowd surrounding the hustings. The pleasant amenities of an election contest were not forgotten, and as soon as the figures became known, cards with black borders were distributed, inscribed as follows: 'Sacred to the memory of Sampson S. Lloyd and Sebastian Evans, LL.D., who departed their political life on Tuesday, November 17, 1868, having fallen victims to that dread disease, Public Opinion, accelerated by the action of the Vote-as-you-are-told Committee. They were interred at the hustings, Town Hall, November 18, amid the woeful lamentations of their chapfallen supporters.'

The elections generally throughout the country resulted in the enormous Liberal majority of 115, the members returned being classed as follows: Liberals, 387; Conservatives, 272. But the Liberal majority was still further slightly enhanced by certain sub-

sequent elections. The Liberals, however, sustained some severe individual losses. Mr. Gladstone, in conjunction with Mr. Grenfell, decided to contest South-West Lancashire against Mr. Cross and Mr. Turner; but although the polling was close, the Conservatives were returned. Fortunately, Mr. Gladstone had already been elected for Greenwich, which place he now sat for. In the northern division of Lancashire, the Marquis of Hartington, who had been a member of Lord Russell's Cabinet, was defeated by Col. Stanley; and in Westminster, Mr. John Stuart Mill was defeated by Mr. W. H. Smith. Amongst well-known members of both political parties who failed to secure seats at this election were Mr. Roebuck, Mr. Milner Gibson, Mr. Bernal Osborne, Lord Amberley, Mr. Horsman, Sir J. Karslake, Sir R. Baggallay, Mr. Huddleston, Q.C., and the Lord-Advocate for Scotland.

On the 1st of December, Ministers, being in a hopeless minority, decided to tender their resignations at once, without waiting for a formal verdict to be delivered against them by the new Parliament. This unusual step was made known and defended in a circular addressed by Mr. Disraeli to the supporters of the Government in both Houses. This decision obviated the necessity of a formal debate in Parliament, with the inevitable result of a defeat of the Ministry by a large majority. It also gave time to their successors to consider their legislative plans for the ensuing session.

Mr. Gladstone, whose Irish Church policy had resulted in the overthrow of the Conservative Government, was the only possible statesman to accede to office at this crisis, and he accordingly, on the 5th of December, received Her Majesty's commands to form a Ministry. Mr. Bright, who had a strong and natural repugnance to official life, at first declined to accept the seat in the Cabinet offered to him by Mr. Gladstone. In answering his objections, Mr. Gladstone brought forward arguments with the view of proving that it was Mr. Bright's duty to take an active part in the government of the country. In the course of this friendly discussion, which was very protracted, Mr. Bright expressed his belief that he could render more efficient service to Mr. Gladstone's Government as an independent supporter than as a member of

the Cabinet. Replying with a lengthy review of Mr. Bright's career, Mr. Gladstone pointed out that many of the principles which he had espoused had come to be recognised as the true and legitimate policy of the Government; that an opportunity was now afforded to give effect to his views as a member of the Government; and that it was his duty not to shrink from the responsibility which the acceptance of office would entail upon him. In the end Mr. Gladstone prevailed. Mr. Bright accepted the office of President of the Board of Trade, and was sworn in a member of the Privy Council.

In addition to the Premier and Mr. Bright, Mr. Gladstone's first Cabinet was composed of the following members:—Lord Chancellor, Lord Hatherley; Lord President of the Council, Earl de Grey and Ripon; Lord Privy Seal, Earl of Kimberley; Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Lowe; Home Secretary, Mr. Bruce; Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Earl of Clarendon; Secretary for the Colonies, Earl Granville; Secretary at War, Mr. Cardwell; Secretary for India, the Duke of Argyll; Secretary for Ireland, Mr. Chichester Fortescue; First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. Childers; Postmaster-General, Lord Hartington; and President of the Poor Law Board, Mr. Goschen.

On the 21st of December, Mr. Bright appeared before his constituents for re-election. He began his address by observing that it was a dream he had in his youth that as he advanced in life he should find himself more at liberty and less under the control of circumstances or of the opinion of others. He found that that was altogether a dream, and that the longer he lived the less he seemed to be his own master. The proof of this was that he was again before his constituents, and in a new character. The late Government, which was built upon the fraud of the session of 1866, had vanished, and Mr. Gladstone had been called to office by the willing voice of the Queen, and by the approbation of a vast majority of the people in the United Kingdom. Mr. Bright then gave the following account of the circumstances attending his own accession to office:—

‘Mr. Gladstone, soon after he proceeded to the formation of his Administration, asked me to join him in the Government. (Cheers.) I have reason to know that he

made that proposition with the cordial and gracious acquiescence of Her Majesty the Queen. (Renewed cheering.) As you know, I had very strong grounds for refusing to change my seat and place in the House of Commons. The arguments which were used to induce me to do so were based entirely upon what was considered best for the interests of the great Liberal party and for the public service. (Applause.) I was obliged to admit that, on looking at those arguments from such a point of view, they were not easily to be answered. On the other hand, I could only offer arguments of a private and personal nature, though I had believed them to be unanswerable. But when the private and the personal came to be weighed against the apparent public reasons, the private and the personal yielded to the public, and I surrendered my inclination, and I may say also my judgment, to the opinions and to the judgment of my friends. (Cheers.)

‘Mr. Gladstone told me that he did not wish me to accept any office that was inferior in importance or in emolument to any held by any one of his colleagues ; and he proposed that I should accept the position of Secretary of State for India. (Cheers.) Now, very many of my friends have urged in times past that I should undertake this office, and not a few have expressed regret that I have not accepted it now. In a sentence, therefore, I think it right to explain why I took the course which led to my declining such an important post. You know that twelve years ago, just before I came here, I suffered from an entire breakdown of my health, which cut me off from public labours for about two years. The Indian Department, I believe, is one of very heavy work, and I felt I was not justified in accepting it unless there was great probability of some useful result which could not be accomplished under any other chief of that office. (Hear, hear.) I still retain the opinion that the views which I have expressed in times past—especially in the year 1858, when the India Government Bill was passing through Parliament—are sound, and that the time will come when it will be necessary to apply them to the government of India. But I believe that public opinion is not sufficiently advanced to allow us to adopt them ; and that if I had taken that office I should have found myself unable to carry into effect the principles which I believe to be right with regard to the government of India. At the same time I will confess freely that it did not appear seemly for me, and that I should have been in a wrong place, holding the views which I have held from my youth upwards, if I had connected myself distinctly with the conduct of the great military departments of the Indian Government. (Hear, hear.) Looking, therefore, at these points, I felt it my duty to decline the proposition ; and I said that if I was to accept any seat in this Government, I should prefer to take the office of President of the Board of Trade. (Cheers.) In that office I may do a little good, and perhaps I may prevent some harm. (Laughter.) At least it will not, I hope, so burden me that I may be unable to take a part in the discussion of the great questions which must come very speedily before the House of Commons. Having said thus much, I must ask you to consider that, although I stand before you in a new character, I have not the smallest intention of getting rid of my old one. I hope the time has arrived in this country—it has only recently arrived—when a man may perhaps without difficulty, act as an honest Minister of the Crown, and at the same time as an honest and devoted servant and counsellor of the people.’ (Cheers.)

Mr. Bright then went on to ask the patience of his constituents if in time to come he was called upon to make a temporary concession, not of principle, but of matters affecting time and opportunity, for the purpose of maintaining harmony of action among the members of the Government. Speaking of the work of the Government, he observed with regard to the Irish Church that the time for argument had passed, and the time for action had arrived. Alluding to the scandalous way in which elections were now conducted, he held that the adoption of the ballot was not only proper, but inevitable. It was absolutely necessary that public attention should be called to the whole subject of our mode of election. The question of public and national education was also a question which Parliament would no doubt consider, and which no Government could altogether leave out of the catalogue of things which must be considered and must be done. As to our scandalous public expenditure, its reduction, to be considerable and to be effectual, must be extended over several sessions of Parliament. The Administration, to entitle itself to the support of the country, should from session to session exercise a rigid economy, and lessen in a corresponding degree the oppressive and intolerable taxation which pressed heavily upon the English people. The foreign policy of the day was now not to meddle, and muddle, and that was what he (Mr. Bright) had always preached from public platforms. So long as Parliament exacted from the industry of the people seventy millions a year, there was no power on earth that could raise the poor and suffering population from its present position. But there were powerful agencies and services which fought against reduction, and the Government required all the patience, sympathy, and support which the great body of the people could give them in their endeavours to reduce expenditure and to lessen and equalise taxation.

Having observed that the Government must be judged by its acts, Mr. Bright closed with this touchingly simple personal passage :—

‘I have not aspired at any time of my life to the rank of a Privy Councillor, nor to the dignity of a Cabinet office. I should have preferred much to have remained in that common rank of simple citizenship in which heretofore I have lived. There is

a passage in the Old Testament which has often struck me as being one of great beauty. Many of you will recollect that the prophet, in journeying to and fro, was very hospitably entertained by what is termed in the Bible a Shunammite woman. In return for her hospitality he wished to make her some amends, and he called her to him and asked her what there was he should do for her. "Shall I speak for thee to the king," he said, "or to the captain of the host?" Now it has always appeared to me that the Shunammite woman returned a great answer. She replied in declining the prophet's offer, "I dwell among mine own people." (Cheers.) When the question was put to me whether I would step into the position in which I now find myself, the answer from my heart was the same—I wish to dwell among mine own people. (Great applause.) Happily, the time may have come—I trust it has come—when in this country an honest man may enter the service of the Crown, and at the same time not feel it in any degree necessary to dissociate himself from his own people. (Cheers.) Some partial friends of mine have said that I have earned all this by my long services in the popular cause. (Hear, hear, and cheers.) They know not what they say. They would add labour to labour, and would compensate a life of service by a redoubled responsibility. I am sensible of the duty which is imposed upon me as a Minister of the Crown. It is my duty faithfully to perform that which belongs to such a position; but I have not less faithfully to act as becomes an honest representative of the people. (Cheers.) I shall make the attempt. There are many who believe the attempt must fail. I hope that it will not fail. I will do all that I can to make it succeed. And if I should find that the two offices of which I am speaking are inconsistent or discordant, I hope at least that I shall be able to discover which of them it is right for me to surrender.' (Cheers.)

No opposition was offered to Mr. Bright's re-election. With regard to his acceptance of office, the entire press of the country endorsed his decision in this matter. The right hon. gentleman performed his duties with general acceptability, as might have been expected from his long training in business habits, though it was not a little remarkable to find the impassioned orator answering questions connected with his department from all the dry details of trade up to, or down to, 'bottle-nosed whales.'

The Irish speeches of Mr. Bright in the sessions of 1868 and 1869 have been already dealt with; but there were two other speeches during these sessions on questions of public moment which call for treatment here. The first of these, delivered in the session of 1868, referred to Nova Scotia and the Confederation scheme. An Act had been passed in the previous session for uniting the British North American provinces in one Confederation, and this Act met with a very adverse reception from a considerable portion of the inhabitants of Nova Scotia. Remonstrances were addressed

to the Crown, and the attention of the British Parliament was directed to the matter. A series of resolutions were passed in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly on the 21st of February, 1867, to the effect that the Assembly, in consenting to Confederation, had acted in excess of its powers; that even if it possessed such a right, it had not empowered the delegates to form a Confederation which should omit Newfoundland and Prince Edward's Island; and that the scheme consented to did not ensure just provision for the rights and interests of the province, but, if finally confirmed, would deprive the people of the province of their rights, liberty, and independence. Other resolutions equally strong and definite were also adopted, and the passing of the bill through the Imperial Parliament was imputed to 'fraud and deception' committed by persons who misrepresented the public sentiment of the colony.

The case of the remonstrants was powerfully stated by Mr. Bright in the House of Commons. He not only presented a petition to the House, complaining of the absorption of the province into Canada by the Confederation Act, but on the 16th of June brought forward a motion for inquiry, giving in his speech effective expression to the grievances of the petitioners. In the outset, he traced with great detail the history of the question of Confederation for some years back, and maintained that the Nova Scotians had never agreed to anything beyond an union of the maritime provinces. The legislature, by sanctioning the plan, had acted contrary to the wishes of the people; the assent of the British Parliament had been obtained, if not by fraud, at least by extravagant over-colouring of the facts; and the Government, when they were pressing the bill on with indecent haste, knew that Nova Scotia was averse to it. Mr. Bright mentioned, as a proof of the public opinion in the colony, that at the last general election, out of fifty-seven members elected to the local and the colonial Parliament, only three were in favour of Confederation, although the influence of the Colonial Office, of the military services, of the Canada officials, and the name of the Queen, had been used on that side. He therefore proposed an Address to the Crown, praying that a Commission might be sent out to inquire into the causes of the discontent felt by the Nova Scotians; and

from such an inquiry he anticipated either that some modifications might be made in the Confederation which would meet the wishes of Nova Scotia, or that the union might be confined to the maritime provinces, or to the Canadas alone. To refuse the inquiry would be to follow up the foolish haste of last year by more perilous obstinacy, and he warned the House in the most solemn tone—deprecating, however, any such unhappy result—that to turn a deaf ear to these complaints of the colony would be the first step towards throwing it into the arms of the United States.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Baxter, but opposed from the Treasury Bench by Mr. Adderley, who, while not denying the discontent, said that Confederation was the only alternative of annexation to the United States, as these provinces could not remain for ever in an independent position. Mr. Cardwell believed that the discontent would pass away, and supported the action of the Legislature. At the close of the debate, Mr. Bright replied forcibly to the arguments which had been raised, but the motion for inquiry was rejected by 183 to 87.

In the session of 1869, Mr. (now Sir) T. Chambers made an attempt—not by any means the first which had been made—to effect the legalisation of marriage with a deceased wife's sister. On the motion for the second reading, Mr. Sclater-Booth moved the rejection of the bill. Mr. Beresford-Hope looked at the question in a very remarkable light. He maintained that the whole tendency of the oft-quoted chapter in Leviticus was against these marriages, and that they had always been condemned by the ecclesiastical law.

Such reasoning on a question of this kind, which was supported by the great bulk of the people, including the religious societies, drew a warm speech from Mr. Bright. He said he had never heard, nor did he expect to hear, an argument against the bill. The opposition rested entirely on sentiment. Speaking of the ecclesiastical 'rubbish' which had been urged against the change, the right hon. gentleman said, 'I recollect that a very distinguished relation of my hon. and learned friend the Solicitor-General (Mr. Coleridge), in one of his poems, speaks of—

“Warriors, lords, and priests,—all the sore ills
That vex and desolate our mortal life.”

Little sympathy as I have with warriors and lords as devastators and rulers of mankind, I am not sure that the mischiefs which they have inflicted upon our race have been greater than those we have suffered from the domination and tyranny of priests.’

Mr. Bright argued that the matter was one of freedom, and the right of every man to follow the law of his own conscience. If there was no Divine law against these marriages, the natural liberty of man and woman ought not to be interfered with except on an overwhelming necessity. There was no reason why a man should be prevented marrying any woman willing to marry him, except natural kinship of blood, and on this ground there was more objection to the marriage of first cousins than with a deceased wife’s sister. He urged as proofs of the legitimacy of these marriages that the persons who contracted them excited no feelings of condemnation among their friends and neighbours, and that none would be so cruel as to stigmatise the offspring of them by the odious epithet of bastard. With respect to the social inconveniences, and the interference with the position of sisters-in-law, apprehended from the change, he pointed out that they had never been experienced in the countries where these marriages prevailed, and he drew a forcible argument from the inevitably unequal operation of the law, the poor not being able to escape from it, while the rich could repair to more tolerant foreign countries. He entreated the House to give by an emphatic vote their sanction to the principle that the common liberty of men and women in this country, in the chief concern of their lives, should not be interfered with by a law of Parliament which had no foundation in nature, and which, while pretending to sanction from revelation, was, in fact, contrary to its dictates.

It was rather singular that the Solicitor-General followed Mr. Bright, and opposed the bill, though he admitted it was difficult for an opponent to discuss it ‘after such a speech from the greatest orator of the day.’ When the division was taken, there was a majority of 99 in favour of the second reading, 243 voting for and

144 against the bill. Mr. Chambers, however, was compelled to withdraw it on the 2nd of August, and in doing so he strongly complained of the obstructive tactics which had been made use of to defeat the measure.

There was a brilliant gathering at the hall of the Trinity House, on Tower Hill, on the 3rd of July, 1869, when the members of that Corporation entertained the Prince of Wales and other members of the Royal Family, Her Majesty's Ministers, and other distinguished persons. In the absence of the Duke of Edinburgh, the Master of the Corporation, the Prince of Wales presided, and was supported by Prince Arthur, Prince Christian, the Prince of Teck, Prince Edward of Saxe-Weimar, Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Bright, Mr. Lowe, Mr. Disraeli, Lord Chief Justice Cockburn, Mr. Cardwell, and others. Amongst the toasts of the evening was that of 'The maritime and commercial interests of the country, and the health of the President of the Board of Trade,' proposed by Lord Taunton. In his reply, Mr. Bright observed, 'I have sometimes imagined what a scene would be presented if any man could from a height survey all the land and waters of the globe. He would see men in every land preparing something to find its way to this country. And if he could look over the waters he would see ships driven either by the winds, or, what is more potent, by steam, bringing from thousands of sources the produce of the industry of man in every country of the world to the shores of this country, to supply the necessities, comforts, and luxuries of the various classes of our people.' On another question, Mr. Bright observed, 'For myself I could never understand why such great navies should be kept up. I would forego all the luxuries of life rather than be tempted to obtain them by crossing the sea. Such are the perils of the deep that I confess I never hear the wind howling, or see the storm raging or the clouds drifting, but I think of my countrymen on stormy seas. Therefore I have a strong sympathy with the lifeboat system, and no less sympathy with the great and benign objects of this Corporation. I know not what may be the fate of that Corporation. I hope it may so come up with the requirements of the times, and keep up with them, that it will

never need to be either disendowed or disestablished. The subject to which I have referred leads me to hope that the industries of our country may be sustained, that its commerce may be wider and wider diffused, that with an economical Government—it is long since we had one—(laughter)—that with an economical Government, and the efforts which I trust will before long be made to support a general and universal education among our people, they may grow in all that is good, and that our country, great and glorious as she is, may be destined for long generations and centuries to hold her place among the nations.'

Early in January, 1870, a deputation waited upon Mr. Bright, asking him to procure some mitigation in the sentences passed on the Fenian prisoners. In reply, Mr. Bright said: 'Though I have been one who has always spoken strongly in favour of changes, and changes which we showed by demonstration were right to be made, still, for all that, I am bound to say that I know no greater enemy to our country than the man who attempts by force of arms to disturb the public peace, and to break down the authority of the laws. Least of all are those to be excused who, being in a country to which they have emigrated, and thereby escaped from what they supposed to be the tyranny and oppression here, are free to do what they please, yet conspire against our common country. I cannot see that any kind of allowance is to be made for such persons.' The right hon. gentleman, however, continued with regard to the prisoners whose claims were specially urged, 'It will be to me the greatest possible delight, as I believe it would be most certainly to every member of the Government, if they could at once throw open the prison doors and let all these men go free. But they must consult what they believe to be the safety of the country, and they must take into consideration the general state of public opinion on this subject throughout the United Kingdom. The Government cannot go before, and it ought not to lag much behind, public opinion.' It may be stated that before the close of the year Mr. Gladstone granted an amnesty to the Fenian prisoners still detained at Portland, but coupled with the condition of banishment from the United Kingdom for life, without distinction of persons.

When Parliament met in 1870, Mr. Bright was suffering from symptoms of illness such as had prostrated him in the year 1856. He was quite unable to attend the House of Commons, and asked Mr. Gladstone to permit him to retire from his office in the Government. Mr. Gladstone objected, and expressed a hope that he would be able to be in his place on the second reading of the Irish Land Bill—to which Mr. Bright replied that he felt he should not return during the session,—that on a former occasion he had been absent for two years, and now he thought his condition still more serious. This proved to be the fact. He spent some weeks at Norwood, and in Brighton, during February and March; he then went down to Llandudno, where he spent six months, for much of the time in a state of great feebleness, unable to write, or to read, or even to converse, except with Mrs. Bright and his daughter, who were constant in their attendance upon him. In the month of October he returned home, to his house at Rochdale, and in December he urged Mr. Gladstone to forward his resignation of his office to the Queen, feeling certain that for at least another year he should not be able to undertake any Parliamentary or official duty. The resignation was reluctantly accepted.*

During the year 1871 Mr. Bright spent some months in Scotland, and paid a visit to Mr. Bass, M.P., at Glen Tulchan Lodge, on the Spey; here, as on former occasions, he received great kindness, and his health sensibly improved. Scotland has always had great charms for Mr. Bright; two lines from his pen

* The whole of the London and provincial press of course commented upon the retirement. The *Times* observed that Mr. Bright carried with him into retirement the hopes as well as the good wishes of his countrymen. The *Daily Telegraph* remarked that 'the middle classes of this country may search for many a long day before they find so true a representative as John Bright.' The *Daily News* affirmed that Englishmen, without distinction of party, would share in the regret at Mr. Bright's resignation. The *Morning Post* said there was probably not a man in the country, be his politics what they might, who would not receive the intelligence with the greatest concern and regret. 'The loss of such a figure,' said the *Spectator*, 'if we are to lose it—or even to lose the most characteristic signs of it—from our political world, is a loss we can ill afford. As a Radical and a Democrat, he has taught the nation to measure popular feeling by a high standard,—a standard beside which all mob oratory is at once perceived to be artificial and dishonest,—and this alone has purified the atmosphere of the political school he represented, while his grand and nervous English has left to English literature a rich legacy of renown.' The leading provincial journals expressed themselves in similar terms.

or voice were once quoted by a Scotch gentleman proud of his country,—

‘Land of mountain, strath, and stream,
Glorious land, art thou a dream?’

and this ‘glorious land’ he has always preferred to those portions of the Continent most frequented by English travellers. That the salmon river has charms for him need not be denied. It was in 1856, during his long illness, that, at the urgent recommendation of the late Dr. M’Leod, of Ben Rhydding, he began to cast a fly on the pools and streams of the Scottish rivers. As the result of this exercise—from spending many hours almost daily on the river’s bank—he recovered the health he had lost in the long nights in the House of Commons, and in the fierce political conflicts of the time which preceded the years 1856 and 1870. It was not the instinct of the sportsman, but the search for health, which connected Mr. Bright with so many of the rivers of Scotland.

While at his residence of One Ash, in January, 1872, he addressed the following letter on the Home Rule question—which was then a prominent topic of discussion—to The O’Donoghue :—
‘It is said that some persons engaged in the canvass of the county of Kerry have spoken of me as an advocate of what is termed Home Rule in Ireland. I hope no one has ventured to say anything so absurd and untrue. If it has been said by any one of any authority in the county, I shall be glad if you will contradict it. To have two representative legislative assemblies or Parliaments in the United Kingdom would, in my opinion, be an intolerable mischief; and I think no sensible man can wish for two within the limits of the present United Kingdom who does not wish the United Kingdom to become two or more nations, entirely separated from each other. Excuse me for troubling you with this. It is no duty of mine to interfere in your contest, but I do not wish to be misrepresented.’

A meeting of representative working men of London was held in Bolt Court on the 13th of February, 1872, to consider the propriety of presenting a congratulatory address to Mr. Bright on his restoration to health and return to public life. The right hon. gentleman was asked whether he would receive the address, and

name a day for its presentation. In his reply to this 'kind and flattering proposal,' Mr. Bright wrote: 'I am not going up to London to attend Parliament immediately, although it is a great disappointment to me to be so long absent from the duties which I owe to my constituents; but I know well that it is far better for me to give myself a little more time than to plunge into the turmoil of public life before I am well enough to encounter it. I must ask you to let the matter rest for a time. I cannot object to receive your address, so kindly intended and so complimentary; but I should prefer a postponement of it to some period which may be better for me, and perhaps not less convenient for those who may wish to see me in connection with it. I beg you will convey my thanks to those with whom you are associated, for the kindness they intend to show me. I am very sensible of the value of their goodwill and friendship.'

The scene of his oratorical triumphs at Westminster did, however, receive a flying visit from Mr. Bright on the 11th of April, 1872. He attended before the commencement of the sitting and the arrival of the Speaker for prayers. An account of this visit states that 'as members came in, without distinction of party, they gathered round the right hon. gentleman, who sat for some little time in the seat just below his usual place, and greeted him with great cordiality. For some time Mr. Bright held a kind of *levée*, group after group forming about him. He afterwards took his old place at the upper corner of the second bench below the gangway, and remained there until prayers had been said. After a short conversation with the Speaker he left the House. He also visited the Reform Club, where he was most heartily received. Traces of the trying illness through which he had passed were noticeable. His hair, which before his illness was dark or grizzled, and abundant, had become perfectly white, imparting, together with his florid complexion, a venerable appearance.'

In his retirement, Mr. Bright could not escape those communications which beset all public men. Perhaps the most remarkable item in his correspondence, however, was a letter from a gentleman who had been told that the English Republicans would select

Mr. Bright as their first president, and who wrote to ask whether he would accept the post. Mr. Bright replied as follows: 'Your Republican friend must not be a very desperate character if he proposes to make me his first president, though I doubt if he can be a friend of mine. As to *opinions* on the question of monarchy or republicanism, I hope and believe it will be a long time before we are asked to give our opinion; our ancestors decided the matter a good while since, and I would suggest that you and I should leave any further decision to our posterity. Now, from your letter, I conclude you are willing to do this, and I can assure you I am not less willing.'

In July, 1872, the friends of Mr. Bright residing in the Staffordshire Potteries made him a suitable and noteworthy presentation, in the shape of a cabinet and collection of ceramic art. The walnut cabinet, which was in the style of Louis XVI., was designed by Mr. F. W. Moody. Divided into two compartments, the upper was filled with vases and other examples of the art and industry of the district, executed at the various manufactories of Messrs. Minton, Messrs. Wedgwood, and Messrs. Copeland. In the lower compartment were three majolica vases by Wedgwood. The decorations of one of the choicest pieces of Staffordshire ware were emblematic of Mr. Bright's career and services. The inscription upon the cabinet read as follows: 'To the Right Hon. John Bright, M.P., whose foresight, eloquence, and faithful character have greatly contributed to his country's prosperity, these specimens of ceramic art are presented by admirers in the Staffordshire Potteries. The presentation took place at Rochdale, in Mr. Bright's house, and it was accompanied by an address setting forth Mr. Bright's services in the cause of the people, and expressing a hope that he might speedily be restored to perfect health, and to his place in the national councils. A deputation of ten gentlemen had been appointed to wait upon the right hon. gentleman, and the presentation was made by Mr. Thomas Pidduck, ex-Mayor of Hanley, and Chairman of the Central Committee.

Mr. Bright, in reply, observed that this was one of the occasions when men who were most accustomed to public speaking found

it difficult to express what they feel. The present gift had a special significance. 'Those who make me this gift are persons of whom I have had, until recently, no knowledge whatever, and I presume they know nothing of me excepting in my public character. I may assume, therefore, as I assume from your kind address, that my public course and labours have met generally, not probably in all cases, but generally, with the consent and approval of those whom you represent. At the same time, I am deeply touched with the consideration of the circumstances under which, and the time at which, this gift is made. The idea was not formed when I was actively engaged before the public, either as a member of Parliament or a member of an administration. I had not returned with friends and associates from any fresh political success. On the contrary, I was suffering from a severe and protracted illness. It was at a time when it was not unlikely that I should never again be able to return to public life. I was enfeebled and prostrate to an extent only known to my own family. And at that time your kindness and friendship were awakened, and you conceived the idea of doing me this honour and marking your approbation by this gift. I think, therefore, that more than on ordinary occasions, I have reason to feel deeply grateful for the kindness you have manifested to me.'

Referring to the subjects mentioned in the address, Mr. Bright showed the beneficial effects which had followed from the abolition of the Corn and Navigation Laws. He also touched upon the enormous change which had taken place with regard to the public press. 'Every one who judges impartially must admit at this time, if we look at the ability, the intelligence, and the general morality with which the press is conducted and written, that it is superior—largely superior—to that which we observed, those at least of us who were able to observe, in the condition of the press thirty or forty years ago.' With respect to the extension of the suffrage, the bill of 1867 had enabled Parliament to do what it had been totally incapable of doing in any previous time—to set up in Ireland for ever complete religious equality, and to bestow upon the vast body of the Irish agricultural peasantry and tenantry

some real security for their property. The ballot also had been established.

Alluding to questions of foreign policy, Mr. Bright remarked that the most important fact in connection with this policy in our time was the Crimean war. He had opposed that war, and looking back for fifteen years, he felt that he was never more justified in any political course which he had taken than he was on that occasion. Only last year the English Government had consented, wisely and necessarily, to surrender what he believed was considered the principal result of the war with Russia—a surrender which ought not to have been necessary, because that which had been enforced upon Russia was what no independent and powerful country would ever long submit to.* As to his attitude on the American civil war, Mr. Bright said: ‘My object was to counsel what at one time I called a generous and not an unfriendly neutrality. I call you to witness, and the whole country to witness, whether, if we had pursued that course of generous neutrality, we should not have escaped embarrassments, negotiations, concessions, and humiliations to which we have been subjected for several years past.’ But in this matter he did not pretend to be wiser than many others who had thought with him. In concluding, he observed—

‘Let us look for a moment, and only for a moment, at the great change which thirty years have made. There are countries which have gone through strange and sanguinary revolutions, and have not been able to make changes so wise and so wholly satisfactory. If those changes had not been made—I will undertake to say that if the Corn Laws had been maintained, if there had been a power which could have maintained them in their unrestricted and cruel character, nothing less than anarchy and insurrection could have followed:

“ For men will break in their sublime despair
The bonds which nature can no longer bear.”

Yet all this has been done in this country with scarcely a single hour's riot, and without, so far as I remember, the sacrifice of a single drop of blood. I suppose there is yet a party in this country which complains of everything that we have said, and nearly everything that we have done. They have obstructed everything, they have contested every point, and they appear to be so ignorant and incapable of discussing these

* Mr. Bright referred to the annulment of the clause in the Treaty of Paris which secured the neutralisation of the Black Sea—a clause which Russia always protested against, as operating injuriously against her.

questions and considering them, that they may be said to be absolutely incurable. That party still appeals, in all its ancient audacity, to the support of the people. I think about the only consolation we have—and it is one dictated by Christian charity—is that they may partake, opponents though they have been—partake fully of the good things which we have provided for them ; for as the sun shines and the rain descends alike on just and unjust, so the blessings of a wise and beneficent legislation are participated in, not more fully by those who have promoted it than by those who have pertinaciously obstructed it.’

Being unable to address his constituents, as he desired, in January, 1873, Mr. Bright wrote to a friend as follows : ‘ There are two questions to which you refer that are probably too large to be undertaken with any degree of completeness in the last years of a Parliament. I allude to the state of the county representation and to the land question. They seem to me the great questions of the immediate future ; and the more they are discussed by the public, the more will Parliament be prepared to deal with them. The question of expenditure is one which demands resolute handling. If the present Government is unable to grapple with it, it should only show us how great are the interests which oppose themselves to economy, and how much an earnest public opinion is wanted to arrest the extravagant and scandalous expenditure which every statesman in turn condemns, and which not one of them seems able to diminish.’

Mr. Gladstone reconstructed his Cabinet in August, 1873, and Mr. Bright accepted the office of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in succession to Mr. Childers. Early in October the right hon. gentleman issued an address to his constituents, seeking re-election. ‘ The office I have accepted,’ he wrote, ‘ is not one of heavy departmental duty, or I could not have ventured upon it, but it will enable me to take part in the deliberations of the Cabinet, and to render services to principles which I have often expounded in your hearing, and which you have generally approved,—more important, I believe, than any I could render in the House of Commons unconnected with the Government. I do not write to you a long address, for I am not a stranger to you. I hold the principles when in office that I have constantly professed since you gave me your confidence sixteen years ago. When I find myself unable to advance those principles, and to serve you honestly as a Minister, I shall

abandon a position that demands of me sacrifices which I cannot make.'

The right hon. gentleman was returned without opposition, and on the 22nd he addressed his constituents at Bingley Hall, Birmingham. The occasion was one never to be forgotten. The Hall, which holds between fifteen and twenty thousand persons, was densely crowded.*

When Mr. Bright entered the central gallery from the side, 'there arose at once a deafening uproar, as the entire mass of people in the galleries and on the floor abandoned themselves to an irrepressible enthusiasm of welcome. It was as if the Liberal party, so torpid of late that its enemies declared it to be expiring, had, recognising its long-lost leader, suddenly found its old purpose and its old energy, and had risen to its feet with a bound, eager for battle, and confident of victory. That, at any rate, was the significance of the tempestuous cheering and the frantic waving of hats and handkerchiefs; and the frenzy invaded and subjugated even the ladies in their distant retreat.' The Mayor presided, and called upon Mr. J. S. Wright to move the following resolution: 'That, in the name of his constituents, and on behalf of the country, this meeting offers to Mr. Bright heartfelt congratulation on his restoration to health; that it rejoices in his ability to resume the labours of statesmanship; and that it regards his entrance into the Ministry as a pledge of distinctly Liberal policy in the future, and as a means of reviving

* Amongst those present were Mr. Childers, M.P., Mr. George Dixon, M.P., Mr. Watkin Williams, M.P., Mr. Shaw Lefevre, M.P., Mr. James Howard, M.P., Mr. Duncan M'Laren, M.P., the Hon. C. G. Lyttelton, M.P., Sir Charles Reed, M.P., Mr. E. M. Richards, M.P., Mr. J. J. Colman, M.P., Sir Thos. Bazley, M.P., Mr. Samuelson, M.P., the Hon. and Rev. W. H. Lyttelton, the Hon. Chandos Leigh, the Hon. Lyulph Stanley, Mr. J. Albert Bright (Mr. Bright's eldest son), Lady Scott, the Rev. J. Percival, of Clifton College; Revs. C. Vince, R. W. Dale, H. W. Crosskey, G. T. McCarthy, Brooke Lambert, W. H. Blamire, and J. J. Brown, and Messrs. Jaffray, Middlemore, Chamberlain, Sturge, Bunce, Manton, Timmins, Pemberton, &c. The following associations were also represented—Blackburn Reform Club, West Cheshire Liberal Association, National Reform Union, Leeds and Salford Liberal Associations, the National Amalgamated Society of Brassworkers, the Birmingham Law Society, East Worcestershire Liberal Registration Association, Leigh Reform Union, Bury, Wolverhampton, Burnley, Ledbury, and Wrexham and Denbigh Liberal Associations, the London, Manchester, and Todmorden Reform Clubs, the Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control, the Coventry Liberal Club, Marsden and Huddersfield Liberal Associations, Manchester Liberal Club, Kendal Liberal Reform Association, and the National Agricultural Labourers' Union.

the enthusiasm of the Liberal party, and especially of that section of it which has been alienated by recent legislation.' The latter part of the resolution referred to the Nonconformists, and the grievances of which they strongly complained under the Education Acts. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain seconded the resolution, and made a very felicitous allusion at the close of his observations. If, he said, the Ministerial policy had recently struck false notes and jarred with Liberal principles, until these had been 'like sweet bells jangling out of tune and harsh,' now they looked hopefully forward, expecting a master-hand once more to touch the string, and confident that the first strain of the old harmony would dispel the evil spirits of obstruction and reaction which previous discord had started into life.

Upon Mr. Bright rising to speak, there was another demonstration, which visibly moved the speaker himself. Observing that it was nearly five years since he stood in that hall, Mr. Bright said that his heart was full at this fresh manifestation of the confidence and good opinion of his constituents. If he looked back a little, it would not be with the view of entering into enthusiastic laudation of the Administration; but at the same time the past five years were memorable years, and the measures of the Administration would bear comparison with those of any Government which had ever preceded it. They had lived to see that an Establishment might be removed, and yet that a Church might exist and religion prosper without the support of the State. Another great principle had been established by the Irish Land Act of 1870, for there had since been no diminution of rent, and no insecurity in its payment. Further, by the abolition of purchase in the army the corruption market had been closed for ever in that department of the public service. The ballot had been established; so had also another valuable principle, namely, that the House of Peers should no longer continue to be the highest court of justice in the kingdom.

The manner in which Mr. Bright spoke his opening sentences, said the leading local journal, and the way in which he gratefully testified to the fidelity of his constituency during the four years in which his voice had been silent, bore testimony that in meeting

